

# The London School of Economics and Political Science

## *A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of American 'Dual Containment' Policy in the Persian Gulf: 1991- 2001*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the American policy of 'dual containment': the assumption by the US of a predominant role in the security system of the Persian Gulf in the 1990s, necessitating the simultaneous 'containment' of both Iran and Iraq. American policy towards Iran receives special attention thanks to its more unusual aspects, including the vehemence of American attempts to isolate it.

While other scholars have sought to explore the empirical aspects of this policy, this thesis seeks to place it within an overarching theoretical framework derived from neoclassical realism (NCR). Additionally, the thesis integrates insights drawn from Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to explain the impact of domestic variables on the formation of American policy towards Iran and Iraq during this era.

In terms of domestic factors, the thesis identifies three key 'intervening variables' and their role in the adoption and evolution of dual containment: perceptions of threat on the part of policymakers, domestic political structures, and the operation of policy coalitions. In terms of the external, the role of the idiosyncratic 'tripolar' dynamics of the Persian Gulf region in shaping American policy is examined, as is the longstanding American interest in the Persian Gulf as an area of important national interest and key importance in the global economy, which endured into the 1990s despite the end of the Cold War.

The thesis concludes that US policy towards Iran and Iraq was shaped by the intervening variables it identifies and examines. It strongly reflected the perceptions held by American policymakers of American power, and also of Iran and Iraq as 'rogue' or 'outlaw' states, and the measures perceived as necessary to advance Arab-Israeli peace. Moreover, it also reflected the influence of domestic interest groups and Congressional activism in the realm of foreign policy.

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## **CHAPTER 1 Introduction**

“[American] Iran policy has been a failure at every level. The message has been: (1) You are evil; (2) We won’t talk to you unless you come out with your hands up; (3) We intend to overthrow your regime; (4) if you don’t comply we might bomb you; (5) if you try to develop a deterrent we will certainly bomb you, maybe with nuclear weapons.”

Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, interview with author, Washington D.C., February 2011.

### **1.1 Context**

The central objective of this thesis is to examine, from the perspective of International Relations theory, American ‘dual containment’ policy in the Persian Gulf. This was the avowed foreign policy of the Clinton administration with respect to this sub-region. This policy, which was directed at the problems Washington perceived as stemming from Iran and Iraq, was formally introduced to the world in a speech by a National Security Council official in 1993, and essentially persisted until the end of the second Clinton administration, despite evolutions in form. The policy encapsulates many of the key features of American policy in the Middle East: its intensely antagonistic relationship with Iran after the 1979 revolution, its preoccupation with Israel, its close alignment with the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, and its entanglement with the Persian Gulf in particular and its close involvement with the affairs of the Middle East overall.

Despite its importance, dual containment has not been considered by scholars in a systematic, theoretically-informed way. Scholars of International Relations and Middle East studies have done excellent and comprehensive work on American relations with Iran and Iraq, and American foreign policy in the post-Cold War era in general, so many studies give at least a brief description of this policy and American foreign policy in the 1990s. Nonetheless, few have attempted to examine ‘dual containment’ itself from a theoretical perspective rooted in International Relations theory. This is an understandable lapse to some extent – compared to events of the



1991 Gulf War and the attacks of 11 September 2001, nothing as dramatic happened. Overall, dual containment has predominantly been viewed almost as a historical footnote in the post-Cold War, pre 9/11 era, primarily of interest to scholars researching more expansive issues who are required to discuss it for the sake of thoroughness. This is a regrettable oversight, but it offers the researcher a new opportunity to approach American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf from a fresh perspective, and attempt to glean insights about the nature of the American relationship with the states of the Gulf, and Iran in particular.

It must also be noted that this thesis focuses specifically on the Clinton administration, though its predecessor is also discussed briefly. This focus is justified if we take the ‘lame duck’ status of an outgoing president, the lengthy US presidential election campaign, the need for an incoming president to find his or her feet, and the frequently slow pace of change in policy in broad terms – in the final and first year of a presidential administration, dramatic changes of direction are extremely unlikely, barring some dramatic event. Therefore, a study of dual containment and the post-Cold War, pre-September 11 era discussed above is best studied through a focus on the Clinton administration.

Aside from scholarship focusing on the American relationship with ‘rogue states,’ dual containment and the era in which it was formulated has received little attention from scholars of American foreign policy more broadly. Chollet and Goldgeier, whose book on this era is one of the few to address this period, aptly characterise this era as ‘misunderstood’ (their work, however, mentions Iran and Iraq only in passing). This is puzzling when one considers that American foreign policy is studied and commented on extensively both in and outside the discipline of IR, doubly so when one considers that it was also a major ‘flagship’ policy in a strategically-vital region.

This brings us to a second point. ‘Dual containment’ is more than a case study in post-Cold War American foreign policy. It also allows us to examine in detail the nature of the American relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), which has been bitterly antagonistic since the founding of the IRI in the wake of the

1979 revolution that overthrew the Shah, a close American ally. From the American side of the relationship, summed up succinctly but somewhat simplistically in the quote that began this chapter, it has been marked by alternating stretches of out-and-out antagonism and periodic attempts at reconciliation. Both of these were on display during the Clinton years, which offers a unique opportunity to examine US-Iranian relations and the factors, both international and domestic, that determine this. As one ‘half’ of dual containment, Iran loomed large in the perceptions of American policymakers, as it continues to do so. The relationship between the two states is a highly unusual one, and both states seem to hold a special place in the politics of the other as a uniquely sinister and threatening enemy. In the words of Hollis, “a special relationship endures in the sense that both US and Iranian policymakers are somehow fascinated by each other and use their relations, even when antagonistic, as a measure of their respective strengths and status domestically.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, at the beginning of 2013, many of the same patterns are repeating themselves, but with a new urgency, amongst them attempts by Congress to escalate American pressure on Iran, unprompted by the president. Much of this thesis is therefore dedicated to examining American relations with Iran in this period, as part of the larger dual containment policy. This stems from the fact that the Iranian half of the policy is the most complex, most troubled (in certain respects), and from the perspective of IR theory requires the most explanation. Although many of the same forces were at work with regards to American policy towards Iraq, these are much less marked, though the course of events has received more attention, and the military clashes between the US and Iraq are more attention-grabbing.

With the end of the Cold War and the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent war to reverse it, American policymakers were confronted with a new set of strategic issues and problems to wrestle with in regards to their existing interests in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. With the demise of the Soviet Union, American policymakers were deprived of the overarching framework that had done so much to determine the outlines of American foreign policy since the end of the Second World War, provoking much soul-searching

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemary Hollis, ‘The US Role: Helpful or Harmful?’ in Lawrence Potter & Gary Sick (eds.), *Iran, Iraq and the Legacies of War* (New York City, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.209

amongst the foreign policy establishment, journalists and pundits about how this new ‘unipolar’ world should be approached, and what America’s role in it would and should be.<sup>2</sup> To some degree, this uncertainty persists to the present day, with the period between 1991 and 2001 referred to simply as the ‘post-Cold War era’ in many sources, a perfect example of the lack of an idea as to what trends in international politics this era embodied, if any. Indeed, one of the defining features of American policymaking in the 1990s was the hunt for a winning entry in the ‘Kennan sweepstakes,’ a doctrine that would embody the challenges and solutions faced by the US in the 1990s, in a similar fashion to the American diplomat George Kennan’s influential espousal of ‘containment’ to meet the emerging Soviet threat in the late 1940s. In the words of another scholar of this era: “Absent the Soviet Union, the fundamental rationale for American foreign policy has been lost, the importance of foreign policy was in question, and the level of public support for foreign-policy actions uncertain.”<sup>3</sup> As Chollet and Goldgeier discuss in their book on American politics in this period, a semi-serious competition was held in the pages of the *New York Times* in 1995 to coin a new name for this time period, and many of the entries reflected a sense of uncertainty and even unease.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the end of the Cold War, the US still faced some major challenges to its interests abroad even as its policymakers and pundits struggled to articulate a new global role for it. The Persian Gulf remained a region where international instability and turmoil could generate significant economic disruption and threaten the outbreak of new wars and the re-ignition of old ones, both of which would have serious impacts on longstanding American interests. This was exacerbated by the traditional American perception of the Persian Gulf as a key focus of strategic power, and in particular there remained the tricky question of American relations with Iraq and Iran, which were both hostile to the US and perceived as dangers to American

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, see Richard Haass, ‘Paradigm Lost,’ *Foreign Affairs*, 74 (1) 1995, pp.43-58

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Kitchen, *American Power: For What? Ideas, Unipolarity and America’s Search for Purpose Between the ‘Wars’ 1991-2001*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics, 2009

<sup>4</sup> Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *Between the Wars From 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2008). Entries included “The Muddle Ages” and the “Cold War Lite Era.” Sarah Boxer, ‘Words for an Era; No Time Like the Present to Leave Something for Posterity,’ *The New York Times*, 2 April 1995

interests. The dilemma faced by the American policymakers was therefore a pressing one that would have to be addressed if the US was to retain an international role. The answer formulated by American policymakers was 'dual containment.' In the absence of a global, over-arching security threat, dual containment was therefore one of the major foreign policies of its era, addressing one of the few genuine strategic challenges still facing the US. It was a concrete problem rather than a conceptual one like the need to formulate a new vision for America's role in the world, but one that was nonetheless a product of the new era of uncertainty: virtually unchallenged American power, but uncertainty as to what to do with it, and with an increasing preoccupation with domestic issues and concerns.

'Dual containment' itself is a somewhat obscure term, largely unknown to anyone from outside of the community of policymakers and students of American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. In fact, the lifespan of the term itself was a limited one. Once it was coined, it was rarely used in official discourse, was criticised by some policymakers as misleading, and was much-maligned by analysts and observers. Its broadest definition runs as follows: the simultaneous 'containment' of the regional influence of both Iran and Iraq by the US, which was implemented concurrently but via different means and with different objectives. For instance, the sanctions on Iraq were multilateral (though the US had great influence as one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council), while sanctions on Iran were unilateral. 'Regime change' was the implicit goal in the case of Iraq, while this was never seen as realistic in Iran by the Clinton administration. While in some ways it resembles two policies running in parallel, there is an unbreakable connection between the two thanks to the 'brute fact' of geography: the two states are neighbours, and the fact that both found themselves the target of American hostility. Underlying this is a more subtle truth: the assumption by the US of a direct, predominant role in Persian Gulf security, one that excluded both Iran and Iraq from the exercise of regional influence and treated them both as pariahs, stemming in large part from the American role as the security guarantor of the Gulf's Arab monarchies, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

While it was militarily predominant, maintaining the strongest military forces in the region to contain Iraq and Iran, the role played by the US in this era was quasi-hegemonic compared to the dominance exhibited by the British Empire in the Gulf in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Also, while American power was the lynchpin that allowed the system to function, the basic architecture of the system itself was inherently limiting and sub-optimal from the American perspective. While the US was relatively successful in accomplishing its goals of excluding both states from the regional security system that it oversaw, it was unable or unwilling to effect the changes it desired in these states, leaving it to manage a system it disliked, maintaining the least worst (from the US perspective) balance of forces.. Specifically, while it was a key part of the security system, at the same time the US was unable to fully enforce its will upon its allies and adversaries, and was reluctant to go further than containment and into the territory of ‘regime change,’ and exercised little influence over the domestic affairs of regional states. As Gause observes, the US merely sought to contain Iraq and Iran, and lacked even diplomatic representation in those states, potentially the most powerful and influential in the region, and sought only “to sustain the regional territorial and political status quo.”<sup>5</sup> In this sense it was in keeping with Stephen Walt’s summing up of Clinton’s overall approach to foreign policy during eight years in office: “hegemony on the cheap.”<sup>6</sup> By the end of Clinton’s term in office, ‘dual containment’ was still in effect, according to the broad definition offered above: both Iran and Iraq were still problem states for the US, and both were the target of American sanctions, and the US still played a predominant role in Persian Gulf security. Despite the adoption of this policy, alternative options were theoretically available, and there were other junctures after the adoption of the policy when alternative paths could have been taken. What remains, therefore, is the question as to why events unfolded as they did.

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<sup>5</sup> F. Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.88

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Walt, ‘Two Cheers for Clinton’s Foreign Policy,’ *Foreign Affairs*, 79 (2) 2000, p.79

In terms of the bilateral relations between the US and Iraq and between the US and Iran, the picture is, of course, far more complex. Nonetheless, US foreign policy towards both was subjected to the tumult of domestic American politics, stemming both from the nature of the American political system and the unique constellation of political forces acting in this system to produce and shape dual containment. With the assumption of a quasi-hegemonic role in Gulf security, American policymakers were left with important details to work out, details that would define the policy, namely the relationship of the US to Iran and Iraq. The relationship with these two states, particularly Iran, was often defined as much by domestic American politics as much as it was with global and regional political forces and trends.

## **1.2 Dual containment and the absence of theory**

Some other studies have sought instead to place ‘dual containment’ within a different, wider framework, such as the American approach to ‘rogue states,’<sup>7</sup> or treated it only as a part of the wider timeframe of American policy in the Middle East in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In terms of the latter, as a consequence of the broad nature of this focus the era itself also risks being overshadowed by larger events in the region with a wider, global profile: it falls between the 1991 Gulf War, and the momentous events of 11 September 2001, both of which have obvious and strong connections to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf in particular, and were described by Halliday as two of the four key events in the modern history of the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> Dual containment therefore can tell us much about American policymaking in the post-Cold War era, and before the events of ‘9/11’ brought in their own changes to global politics and altered the trajectory of American foreign policy. There is also a tendency amongst some scholars to use American domestic

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<sup>7</sup> See Robert Litwak, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Rogue States: Containment After the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Jeffrey Fields, *Adversaries and Statecraft: Explaining US Foreign Policy Towards Rogue States*, PhD thesis, University of Southern California, 2007

<sup>8</sup> Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.130

politics as an explanatory factor in the shaping of American foreign policy, but without integrating this into a wider theoretical framework or examining it in an in-depth manner. In many examples, causal force is attributed to domestic political variables, but the mechanisms by which these domestic pressures are translated into policy often go unexamined, as do the reasons why this occurs. The following sections discuss examples of these two tendencies, and demonstrates the gap this leaves in the literature, a gap this thesis aims to fill.

Litwak's work on 'rogue states' and US foreign policy is an example of both of these tendencies. It is comprehensive and insightful, but focuses on the concept of 'rogue states' per se, and while its treatment of US foreign policy towards Iran and Iraq includes a domestic political component, it does not integrate this into a wider theoretical framework in a consistent way. It also focuses on larger issues, taking as its starting point the concept of a 'rogue state,' and its place in the post-Cold War World, despite his admission that the Clinton administration's codification of 'rogue states' (or 'outlaw regimes' or 'backlash states' or any other term) emerged from 'dual containment' itself.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, it also fails to address the regional factors influencing American foreign policy: though Litwak does argue that one of the central obstacles to an American-Iranian rapprochement is the struggle between hardliners and reformists within the Iranian government, he does not examine the impact of the balance-of-power dynamics of the Persian Gulf, or the impact of wider Middle Eastern issues, such as the Arab-Israeli peace process. As stated above, the domestic context in which *American* foreign policy is made is not discussed in detail either, though he holds that this is an important factor. There are two major examples of this. Although Litwak concedes that congressional pressure was an important factor in the tightening of sanctions on Iran, and to some degree Iraq, and argues for the importance of "political impetus" from domestic constituencies in bringing this about,<sup>10</sup> he does not deal with the institutional or factional aspects of this factor in a theoretically informed manner. Nor does he integrate his assertion that a major component of America's adversarial attitude towards 'rogue states' is a reflection of its "unique political culture", which reflects a "traditional Manichean

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<sup>9</sup> Litwak, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Rogue States*, p.57

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p.63

streak of American diplomacy in which international affairs is cast as a struggle between forces of good and evil” into a larger theoretical framework, though he holds it to be equally important.<sup>11</sup>

Niblock tackles the issue of ‘rogue states,’ albeit somewhat indirectly, in his study of the application of UN sanctions in the post-Cold War era.<sup>12</sup> While his case studies (Iraq, Sudan, and Libya) are detailed and informative, he does not advance a comprehensive theoretical framework either. He instead begins with the assumption that several trends in the post-Cold War era, such as the end of East-West competition, allowed and incentivised powerful Western states to attempt to ‘contain’ states “deemed to be playing an international role that was not only disruptive to US interests but was also contrary to the norms and values of the international order.”<sup>13</sup> As such, he focuses on the effects of international sanctions and the sanctions themselves as a means, rather than discussing in detail the ends, or the factors making these desirable ends from the perspective of the states that seek to impose them.

The absence of a theoretical framework encompassing domestic and international variables is partially addressed by Jeffery Fields, whose research also focuses on American policy towards ‘rogue states,’ though he includes Syria within this category, as well as Iran, Libya and North Korea. This contrasts somewhat with Litwak’s definition of a ‘rogue state,’ which excluded Syria on the grounds that the US government has sought to engage with it diplomatically at various times. Fields also excludes the example of Iraq, which while less puzzling than that of Iran (at least in the 1990s), is by no means irrelevant. In this sense, his discussion of ‘dual containment’ is incomplete. Nonetheless, Fields also attempts to answer the question as to why some states are engaged by the US (like Syria and North Korea), while others are contained with economic sanctions and military force (like Iran and Iraq). He goes further than Litwak in that he advances a theoretical framework to

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<sup>11</sup> Liwak, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Rogue States*, p.63

<sup>12</sup> Tim Niblock, *Pariah States and Sanctions in the Middle East: Iraq, Libya, Sudan* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.12



explain these policy choices, one which is also derived from neoclassical realism (hereafter abridged to 'NCR'). The international and domestic variables that he introduces in his attempts to explain these differences derive from polyheuristic decision theory and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), and as a whole his work "emphasises the role of ideology, American exceptionalism and powerful elite decision-makers in narrowing action choices, sustaining status quo...strategies, and shaping the overall directions of US policy."<sup>14</sup> He therefore contends that four factors are significant in forming a 'domestic lens' that conditions American response to systemic incentives: elite power, ideology, information gaps, and historical legacies.<sup>15</sup> Fields does not arguably give a full account of the institutional context in which American policy is made, or the impact of political coalitions and interest groups, which many scholars agree are crucial factors in the American policymaking system. Instead, his approach to the construction of a 'domestic lens' is somewhat nebulous, including so many factors as to be indistinct, though it is broadly correct in its emphasis on the powerful role played by domestic political forces.

Among other scholars who have tackled the subject of the influence of different groups within American politics on its foreign policy towards Iran and Iraq, the work of Trita Parsi<sup>16</sup> and Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer stands out.<sup>17</sup> Both focus on the role of the pro-Israel lobby and the government of Israel in attempting to portray Iran as a dangerous and malevolent force that requires an American response. Although these works do not focus on the Clinton administration and the 1990s exclusively, they devote some time and energy to arguing that the Israeli government, and American lobby groups like American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), have attempted to shift American policy in a more coercive direction when it comes to Iran, and that 'dual containment' is no exception. Walt and Mearsheimer also argue, controversially, that American policy towards Iraq

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<sup>14</sup> Fields, *Adversaries and Statecraft*, p.14-15

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>16</sup> Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007)

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007)

(including the 2003 invasion) has also been strongly influenced by pro-Israel groups, while Parsi does not engage with the Iraqi side of the equation of dual containment, focusing exclusively on the relationship between the US, Iran and Israel. Like Litwak's study of rogue states, neither of these works advances a consistent theoretical framework to explain American foreign policy in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, though admittedly Mearsheimer and Walt write from a 'realist' standpoint that strongly influences their analysis. In the case of Mearsheimer and Walt's book, the domestic aspects of the American political system discussed by the authors – its institutional openness to interest groups outside the government and the disproportionate influence of some of these interest groups – are examined and discussed to some extent, but not incorporated into the realist framework the authors rely upon. Fayazmanesh attempts something similar in his study of American sanctions on Iran in the 1990s, and similarly his analysis is largely untroubled by theoretical speculation or analysis. However, he does approach the issue from a direction more attuned to the economics (loosely defined) of the situation. In particular, he argues that decisions by policymakers regarding unilateral American sanctions on Iran were influenced at key points by lobbying by American corporations seeking to advance their commercial interests, and therefore holds that domestic politics is a factor in American foreign policy.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, theoretical engagement with the history of US-Iranian relations is almost wholly absent in Alikhani's work on the subject, though his work is extremely useful and detailed in its study of the American sanctions regime on Iran.<sup>19</sup> Alikhani traces the evolution of American sanctions on Iran in exhaustive detail, and argues that the influence of the pro-Israel lobby and some legislators in pushing the US into taking a more hard-line position in regards to Iran. Once again, his analysis is implicitly based on an FPA framework that he does not explicitly describe, or seek to apply more systematically.

Gerges takes a different tack to all of the above, in that his analysis is focused on American policy towards the various 'Islamist' movements on the rise in the

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<sup>18</sup> Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars and the Policy of Dual Containment* (London: Routledge, 2008)

<sup>19</sup> Hossein Alikhani, *Sanctioning Iran: Anatomy of a Failed Policy* (London: IB Tauris, 2000)

Middle East in the 1980s and 1990s, in order to examine the basis of US foreign policy when it comes to these groups.<sup>20</sup> Iran is one of the case studies he examines, together with Algeria, Egypt and Turkey. Gerges therefore analyses the American relationship with Iran in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in some depth, up to the end of the first Clinton administration and the beginning of the second, and concludes that the American experience with Iran has done much to shape American views of subsequent Islamist movements. He also focuses intensively on the process and ideological/political context of American foreign-policy making, emphasising the latter. In doing so, he takes an implicitly FPA-based approach, examining primarily developments within the domestic US context and their causal impact on shaping the American response to developments in the Middle East. This is a useful study from an empirical perspective and to some degree theoretically as well, but it does not integrate international and domestic-level variables into a single wider framework.

Despite the existing lacuna in the overlapping bodies of literature and research around the subject of dual containment, some useful precedents exist for a study of the kind envisaged for this thesis, i.e. one that seeks to place US foreign policy in the Persian Gulf within a consistent and comprehensive theoretical framework that encompasses different levels of analysis. Yetiv seeks to examine both American foreign-policy decision-making and the viability of the Rational Actor Model (RAM) with reference to a single case, and moreover one that focuses on American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. In this case, the example is the 1991 Gulf War, and the decision of the Bush (1988-1992) administration to reverse Iraq's invasion of Kuwait with military force.<sup>21</sup> In doing so, he seeks to examine a mixture of variables, and determine the influence of each on the decision to go to war in that instance. Yetiv also states that his work is also an attempt to integrate insights from different levels of analysis and theoretical perspectives, as this thesis does.<sup>22</sup> Despite these similarities, Yetiv's project differs in that it contains a larger comparative aspect, testing his theoretical model against alternative explanations. This is not

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<sup>20</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *American and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

<sup>21</sup> Steve Yetiv, *Explaining Foreign Policy: U.S. Decision-Making in the Gulf Wars*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.3-4

attempted here, both for reasons of space (rather than focusing purely on American relations with Iraq as Yetiv does, this thesis devotes much space to Iran), and more importantly, because NCR (used in this thesis) is arguably a much less-developed theoretical position, despite its position within the spectrum of a larger, realist, paradigm. This thesis aims more for the development of its theoretical framework than its testing, and in any event attempts to bridge neoclassical realism and FPA in some respects, rather than locating itself almost wholly within the FPA position, as Yetiv does.

### **1.3 Argument and theoretical framework**

The central claim of this thesis is that ‘dual containment’ is best understood through a framework of neoclassical realism (NCR). This strand of realist theory is a relatively recent outgrowth of a renewed interest in the role of domestic factors in defining the limits of traditional ‘power politics,’ and is therefore distinct from structural realism, such as that advanced by Kenneth Waltz. It holds that while the distribution of power within the international system is a key independent variable in determining the range of a state’s foreign policy, the dependent variable, this is conditioned by the interplay of ‘intervening variables’ within the state itself, which might be key features of its internal politics such as the perceptions of its leaders, its system of government, or a host of others.

The insight that unit-level variables have profound impact on the behaviour of states corresponds to work in many aspects of the sub-field of FPA, which has long approached the problem of understanding the creation and implementation of foreign policy from the opposite direction: looking outwards from within the state, examining which of its domestic features are definitive in the formation of its policy, such as its system of government, competition between different bureaucracies and so on. How can these two theoretical strands be reconciled? It seems intuitive that attempting this would be a worthwhile endeavour from the perspective of NCR. Utilising the pre-existing frameworks and research of FPA has the potential to strengthen overall understanding of how states make and enact foreign policy and to improve our understanding of which intervening variables are significant in this

regard, and in doing so improve the tools open to adherents of NCR, and contribute to its development as a useful research programme within International Relations theory. To date, while NCR theorists have sought to integrate ideational and institutional variables into their analysis, they have been relatively reluctant to integrate FPA research into their analysis. In contrast, this thesis attempts this, and in this sense it is theoretically novel.

The framework used in this thesis draws upon insights from scholars of FPA in its attempts to conceptualise an appropriate and useful NCR-based explanation of American dual containment policy, while remaining inside the overall realist paradigm. Specifically, it is influenced heavily by calls from scholars working in the FPA tradition for the transition towards models that integrate the institutional, social and international contexts of foreign policy into cohesive, unitary models of foreign policy decision-making. In particular, it draws upon some of the work of Thomas Risse (formerly Thomas Risse-Kappen), and his work on the relative autonomy of foreign policy elites, which is defined in turn by the nature of the domestic institutions in which policy decisions are made and the interplay of political forces within these institutions. He uses the terms ‘domestic structures’ and ‘coalition building processes’ of ‘policy coalitions’ to describe these variables, which I have also adopted. Many scholars agree, including Risse, that the American system of foreign-policymaking is a highly ‘open’ one, in which the domination of the process of foreign policy-making by the presidency is diluted by the division of powers between the executive and legislative branches, and that the legislative branch is open to pressure from organised interest groups in society. This means that ‘domestic structures’ and ‘policy coalitions’ are particularly useful concepts to borrow, and in addition have many parallels with contemporary research and theoretical trends amongst scholars of NCR.

The core argument of this thesis is that ‘dual containment’ policy was the product of the interplay of three key intervening variables in the American political system: the perceptions of policymakers, the nature of the ‘domestic structure’ of the American political system, and the influence of ‘coalition building processes’ of ‘policy coalitions’ within the power structure. In applying this NCR framework to

American policy in the Persian Gulf during the 1990s, this thesis argues that the assumption by the US of a quasi-hegemonic role in the security system of the region and the Clinton administration's strong interest in the Arab-Israeli peace process made the dynamics of American domestic politics an important factor in the conception and implementation of dual containment policy. The perceptions of American policymakers of the threat posed by Iran and Iraq and of relative American power, and the domestic structure of the American political system, together with the influence of some social forces such as interest groups, heavily influenced American policy. As discussed above, other scholars have examined different aspects of these features in isolation from each other, but this thesis attempts to create a unified image of American policymaking incorporating all three, given that any monocausal explanation is highly likely to be unsatisfactory given the complexity of the policymaking process. While some scholars highlight the role played by the Israeli government in shaping American perceptions of Iran in the 1990s,<sup>23</sup> others turn their attentions to the role of pro-Israeli lobby groups, like AIPAC, in forming American foreign policy.<sup>24</sup> There is some truth to this claim, but in order to assess how much it is also necessary to give some attention to the context in which this is possible, that of the American political system, which, in one memorable phrase, is an "invitation to struggle" for the direction of American foreign policy. This struggle is in turn motivated by the perceived threat(s) that needs to be addressed.

This reflects a feature within the existing body of NCR research into American foreign policy, which this thesis attempts to address. NCR is only now beginning to seek integrated theories of the impact of both ideational and domestic structural factors in the shaping of foreign policy. The latter have traditionally been more closely studied by scholars working in the FPA tradition. This thesis attempts to integrate the two, partly in order to improve its analytical traction, but also to advance the cause of constructing NCR as a fully-formed theory of foreign policy, and help to bridge the gaps between NCR and FPA.

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<sup>23</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*

<sup>24</sup> The most high-profile, and probably most controversial, being Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and US Foreign Policy*

At the same time, there are also the global and regional aspects of the policy. The factors driving American involvement in the Persian Gulf are also important aspects that require examination for a host of reasons. Amongst these is the fact that any realist theory places a premium on the role of the international system as a driver of foreign policy, by imposing pressures and creating incentives that policymakers strive to address. Any understanding of dual containment policy must also acknowledge the structural factors enabling and shaping American policy, chiefly the role of the US as a global superpower, and the existence of regional factors creating a demand for the intervention of an extra-regional power in regional affairs. To fully understand the nature of dual containment policy, and how it is modulated by the intervening variables within the US government, it is therefore also necessary to examine the larger, external forces driving American involvement in the Persian Gulf, in particular the extensive US interest in the region during the Cold War. This must also include the configuration of regional forces drawing the US in - no region is simply an agency-less chessboard on which global powers impose their own wishes and plans, and to do justice to this fact the impact of these factors must also be weighed and included. The 'push' and 'pull' of American involvement in the Persian Gulf from the end of the Second World War onwards, must therefore also be examined.

## **1.4 Methodology**

As this thesis focuses on a single (albeit wide-ranging) regional foreign policy, and utilises a theoretical framework derived from NCR, its central methodology is one of theoretically-informed historical process-tracing. This results from the intersection of several important factors. One of the primary factors influencing this decision is the scope of this thesis: while dual containment admittedly addressed American relations with two states, these do not form separate case studies in this work, therefore while American policy towards Iran and Iraq are examined separately in order to discuss them as fully as possible, a cross-case comparison is not appropriate in this instance. Process-tracing is therefore a natural choice, as it allows the scholar to examine and assess specific causal mechanisms

within, in this case, the formulation, development, and evolution of a specific foreign policy in a specific time period, and without the use of controlled comparisons.<sup>25</sup>

The enquiry into casual mechanisms is an important aspect of the research contained in this thesis, and it is likewise an important factor in determining the appropriate research methodology. The theoretical aspect is also significant. The use of NCR strongly suggests the usage of a methodology that involves a longitudinal approach that examines the interaction of several factors in a complex causal *process* that cannot be easily quantified. As George and Bennet observe, “The process-tracing method attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable.”<sup>26</sup> Arguably this applies equally well to ‘intervening variables’ of the NCR model, making process tracing highly compatible with the multiple intervening variables model utilised here. More specifically, this thesis utilises the ‘analytic explanation’ variety of process tracing, in which a historical account is adapted into “an *analytical* causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms.”<sup>27</sup>

Although it uses a typological theory (NCR), this thesis does not seek to advance a ‘covering law’ to explain American foreign policy in general, but seeks to illuminate the causal chain governing the adoption of dual containment. It identifies the steps and links between the independent, intervening, and dependent variables in this case under the rubric of NCR, in the hopes of advancing the disciplinary knowledge of American policy towards Iran and Iraq, and in the post-Cold War era more generally, and secondarily contribute to the development of NCR more broadly.

In terms of the existing material it seeks to draw upon, it utilises the study of the extensive literature on American foreign policy formation, American relations

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005) p.214

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.206

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.211 Italics in original text



with the Middle East in general and the states of the Persian Gulf (especially Iran and Iraq), and the equally extensive area studies literature on the politics and international relations of the Middle East. In addition, contemporary news reports from the 1990s, including articles from such publications as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are used in some instances in an attempt to glean insights about developments during this era. The author also conducted a series of semi-structured interviews in early 2011 and 2012 with former officials who served in the State Department, Defense Department and National Security Council during the Clinton years, both in person and via telephone, as well as a smaller number of Congressional committee staff members and former members of lobbying organisations. Finally, it makes use of a small number of declassified documents from the National Security Council, and released by the Clinton Presidential Library to George Washington University's National Security Archive.

## **1.5 Structure of thesis**

Chapter 2 deals with the theoretical framework of the thesis, discussing the origins and the nature of NCR, such as the coining of the term by the academic and journalist Gideon Rose in 1998, and goes into further detail on the work of Risse and the concepts of 'domestic structures' and 'policy coalitions.' It also explores the links between NCR and FPA, and the details of how FPA concepts are integrated into an NCR framework in this case. In addition, it attempts to distil the insights of other scholarship in the burgeoning NCR tradition, and show where and how this thesis fits into it.

In Chapter 3, the 'big picture' of American involvement in the Persian Gulf since the end of the Second World War is examined. In essence, this chapter examines the external, 'push' factors that led to the creation of an extensive American role in the Persian Gulf's regional security system, and how this role fluctuated with regional and global developments, but ended with an extensive American presence in the Persian Gulf region. The dominance of the 'Cold War' and the superpower rivalry with the Soviet Union on American foreign policy is examined, as is how the Persian Gulf figured in this rivalry as an arena of Cold War

tensions. It argues that the Persian Gulf and its energy supplies were seen as a key strategic region and resource that had to be kept clear of Soviet influence, leading the US to utilise various policies, both hands-off and hands-on, over the second half of twentieth century, culminating in the decision to maintain a large, permanent military presence in the years after 1991.

Chapter 4 deals with the Persian Gulf itself, specifically the regional factors and the local balance of power dynamics that created a permissive environment (and subsequently a vacancy for an external actor) which the US was drawn into. As discussed above, no region or state is merely an empty landscape for external powers to shape and impose their policies. Instead, the Persian Gulf forms a scalene triangle, a 'tripolar' system of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, with its own recurring patterns and balance of power dynamics. The chapter discusses how the intermeshing of religion, economics and military strength, regime type and ideology has shaped this tripolar system, and how the breakdown of the system incentivised Saudi Arabia and its fellow monarchies to invite the US into the Gulf to act as their patron and security guarantor in order to counterbalance Iran and Iraq. Together with chapter 3, these two chapters examine the larger, global/external context in which American foreign policy was made, in other words the systemic inputs into the American foreign policy process.

Chapter 5 examines the chronology of the evolution of dual containment from its inception to the end of the Clinton administration. It describes the circumstances in which the policy was formulated, and how it was announced to the world at large, as well as the criticisms levelled against it by scholars and analysts during the 1990s. This chapter in particular discusses the 'ins and outs' of the containment regimes of both Iraq and Iran. In regards to Iraq, it examines the complex series of Security Council resolutions, military strikes, inspection programs and controversies that dragged on through the decade. It details the lengthy 'cat-and-mouse' game played between the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein on one hand and the UN inspectors and the US on the other. It also traces the shifts in American policy towards Iraq, and the American response to the various crises that regularly erupted in Iraq as the multilateral sanctions regime degraded. In regards to

Iran, it discusses the basis and evolution of US policy in in the same era, and how both containment regimes were subject to change thanks to developments in regional, international and domestic American politics.

Chapter 6 is the first of three chapters examining the intervening variables identified at work in the case of dual containment. Firstly, it examines the importance of perceptual variables in NCR in general, and explores how this variable is integrated into the wider NCR framework. Secondly, it discusses the role of perceptions of American power held by policymakers in the formation of US foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. The largest section examines the role of negative perceptions of Iran, prevalent in the US since the hostage crisis of 1980-81, and the role of these perceptions in the formation of adversarial policies towards Iran. This chapter also examines the role of negative perceptions on the part of the US of Islamist political forces, but concludes that this was not a major factor in American policymaking in the case of the executive branch, although it did have some impact on public and Congressional opinion. In addition, this chapter discusses the role of the Israeli government in promoting an alarmist view of Iran and political Islam during the 1990s, drawing upon the research of Gerges and others.

Chapter 7 explores the importance of the second intervening variable, the 'domestic structures' of the American federal government. It therefore examines the unique features of the American system of government, particularly the separation of powers between the presidency and Congress, and its strong influence on the formation of American foreign policy, including dual containment. The system also allows for the easy penetration of social interest groups of the policy-making process, which is examined in further detail in the following chapter, reducing the autonomy of the executive branch in the formation of foreign policy. Finally, the chapter discusses the impact of the Cold War and inter-party disputes (especially after 1994) in narrowing the field of action for the Clinton administration in regards to Iraq and Iran.

Chapter 8 focuses on the third intervening variable, 'policy coalitions' and 'coalition-building processes.' It examines the constellations of interest groups and

their attempts to lobby the US government, and the impact of this on dual containment policy. It argues that the imposition of American sanctions on Iran has been strongly influenced by the activities of pro-Israeli organisations, especially AIPAC, in Congress, and explores the role of these groups in lobbying for the tightening of sanctions on Iran during the 1990s, as well as efforts by lobbyists and groups representing business interests to limit the impact of sanctions on US trade with Iran and other 'rogue states.'

The thesis concludes with a summation of the argument throughout the work, an analysis of what has been achieved in the preceding chapters, and an assessment of the importance of the variables discusses above in relation to one another. It will also briefly explore further avenues for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2 Neoclassical realism, intervening variables and relative autonomy in foreign policymaking**

The theoretical framework used throughout this thesis is a modified neoclassical realist (NCR) one, drawing upon a relatively recent addition to the extensive realist paradigm, and one that is attracting increasing attention from scholars of International Relations. This chapter explains the selection of this framework, and the reasons for the rejection of possible alternative theories. It explores the nature of neoclassical realist thought and contrasts it with its close relatives, classical realism and neorealism, in order that it might be defined and explained as fully as possible. It is argued that NCR represents the best option in regards to the task at hand, namely the exploration and analysis of American dual containment policy in a theoretically coherent and systemic manner.

This chapter also examines the work of several of the ‘third wave’ of NCR theorists, to demonstrate the application of NCR theories in other contexts. As this thesis also makes extensive use of some of the insights from Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), particularly the early work of Thomas Risse (and his collaborators) and his analysis of the degrees of ‘relative autonomy’ enjoyed by governments in the process of making foreign policy, it examines these ideas in some detail as well. In particular, Risse’s analysis of unit-level structural and political factors (in the sense of the institutional nature of the state and the constellations of political forces at work) is discussed, as is the integration of these concepts into an NCR framework at the level of intervening variables, and their compatibility with NCR. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how the framework will be employed in subsequent chapters, and in the context of this thesis as a whole.

## 2.1 The insufficiency of constructivist, systemic and unit-level theories

As this thesis examines a specific foreign policy - dual containment - theories of IR focusing primarily or exclusively on systemic factors are a poor fit for this project, and theories focused on the domestic factors at work in the formation of a state's foreign policy, such as those based in FPA, are a more obvious choice. Nonetheless the systemic aspect cannot be ignored in an analysis of US foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. The American involvement in the Persian Gulf in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been that of an external superpower in a sub-region with its own political dynamics. In other words, American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf has operated in two international contexts simultaneously: global and regional, with the former dominated for the bulk of the post-1945 period by the Cold War. Arguably, an analysis derived from Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), or one based primarily on domestic American political factors, would fail to integrate these aspects in their entirety in a theoretically-consistent way. At the same time, as Putnam suggests, American policymakers have played a 'two level game,'<sup>1</sup> forced to conciliate domestic and systemic/international demands, which makes the inclusion of state-level factors necessary. As a consequence, while systemic factors play a significant role in determining American policy, they are ultimately insufficient to explain particular policy choices,<sup>2</sup> necessitating the use of a theoretical framework more receptive to national and sub-national variables, whilst an analysis focusing primarily on internal politics would miss the important aspects of policy stemming from international power differentials and regional and international inter-state dynamics. Therefore, systemic or 'Innenpolitik' (theories focusing exclusively on the domestic politics and structures of states) are perhaps the least compatible with the goals of the research project represented by this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,' *International Organization*, 42 (3) 1988, pp.427-460

<sup>2</sup> Hence Kenneth Waltz's claim that "the theory [neorealism] does not tell us why state X made a certain move last Tuesday." *Theory of International Politics* (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 1979) p.121

An alternative theoretical framework which appears more appropriate and relevant to dual containment is constructivism. The necessity of accepting sub-national and regional factors does to some extent imply the acceptance of the role of “shared ideas, norms, and values held by actors” in the production, reproduction and alteration of agents and structures.<sup>3</sup> This is especially true in important ways in relation to the Persian Gulf, as the internal security status of many Gulf regimes is strongly influenced by transnational links within the region and sub-region,<sup>4</sup> and “our understanding of the dynamics of policy formulation is enhanced by taking into consideration the factors that inform regimes’ perceptions of their internal security matrix.”<sup>5</sup> An analysis rooted in a constructivist approach is therefore accommodating to this issue. It avoids some of the problems of structurally-focused theories, specifically through sensitivity to the nuances and subtleties of state and regional factors, which, as Barnett argues, may be rooted in shared norms, values and identities.<sup>6</sup> However, it should be noted that constructivists do not enjoy a monopoly on the study of the role of ideational factors such as perception and identity. Other strands of IR theory have a long pedigree of the study of the role of these factors in foreign policy in particular and international politics more generally, with examples such as Jervis’s work on the role of perception abound.<sup>7</sup> This is also true of the ‘classical’ realist (distinct from neorealist) tradition.<sup>8</sup> An analysis based in realism is therefore also a valid choice.

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<sup>3</sup> Dale Copeland, ‘The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay,’ in Stefano Guzzini and Anna Leander (eds.), *Constructivism and International Relations: Alexander Wendt and his Critics* (Oxford, Routledge, 2006), p.3

<sup>4</sup> Gregory Gause, ‘The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia,’ in Raymond Hinnesbusch & Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p.196

<sup>5</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-Oil Era* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011), p.5

<sup>6</sup> Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998)

<sup>7</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976)

<sup>8</sup> For instance, Thucydides’ famous assertion that “The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacadaemon, made war inevitable.” (my italics), *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Richard Crawley, electronic edition (Adelaide, University of Adelaide, 2010), Book 1, chapter 1

The importance of domestic political factors should also not be underestimated with regards to American foreign policy, the subject of this thesis. Admittedly, this includes significant ideational/perceptual factors, which could also be encompassed by a constructivist approach. However, the focus on the co-constitution of systems and identities that is characteristic of constructivist analysis of international politics and foreign policies holds less traction in the case of specific policies like dual containment. As Hadfield-Amkhan argues, constructivism per se has less to say about how identities and ideas are operationalized within states.<sup>9</sup> This allows space for the articulation of a constructivist analysis of the process of foreign policy making, but offers no guidelines as to how this should be accomplished. In other words, constructivism is an approach, not a theory. Arguably, this cannot therefore be taken as a substantial argument in the favour of constructivism, given the necessity of examining the influence of domestic institutions and political factors in the formation of foreign policy.

The analysis in this thesis therefore contrasts with that offered by those that view American foreign policy towards Iran and/or Iraq through a purely constructivist lens. Adib-Moghaddem, for instance, focuses on what he argues are the ideational underpinning of the American approach to Iran.<sup>10</sup> Adib-Moghaddem argues, with some justification, that groups within the US have in recent years successfully ‘manufactured’ an image of Iran as an irrational, hostile international pariah.<sup>11</sup> While this is undoubtedly true in the sense that the language used by policymakers illuminates their perceptions and experience of different issues, this is by itself not sufficient to explain policy developments fully. Consideration of structural factors is also necessary to explain how specific foreign policies are shaped and implemented, at both the international and the domestic (i.e. within a government and society) level. Perceptions and ideology are undeniably important

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<sup>9</sup> Amelia Hadfield-Amkhan, *British Foreign Policy, National Identity, and Neoclassical Realism* (Plymouth: Rowan & Littlefield, 2010), p.27

<sup>10</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, ‘Discourse and Violence: The friend-enemy conjunction in contemporary Iranian-American Relations,’ *Critical Terrorism Studies*, 2 (3) 2009, pp.512-526

<sup>11</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, ‘Manufacturing War: Iran in the Neoconservative Imagination,’ *Third World Quarterly*, 238 (3) 2007, pp.623-653



factors, but these vary from group to group and from person to person, and are often shaped by the position held by policymakers within the policymaking structure (hence the old adage that “where you stand depends on where you sit”). Which perceptions and ideological preferences are more important than others in the formation and implementation of policy is therefore conditioned often by the structure of domestic political institutions and policymaking within states, depending on the nature of factors such as the distribution of power and responsibility within a government. An examination of the ideational factors at work alone is therefore insufficient, unless accompanied by an account of how these factors are operationalized. To have an impact, perceptions of, for instance, a security threat must be acted upon, and the process by which this happens is in part a product of an institutional context and political contestation which can be equally important, and must therefore also be examined. Adib-Moghaddam tacitly recognises this, stating that relations between the US and Iran, arguing that US and Iranian leaders must conduct foreign policy “within a discursive field that is permeated by memories of violence and populated by powerful social agents who are wholly antagonistic to the other side,” but leaves the means that they are able to impact upon the policy-making process (aside from on the broadest scale, that of discourse) largely unexamined.<sup>12</sup>

The question is therefore one of degree (and therefore, to some extent, judgement) to which theoretical framework is superior in its ability to encompass structural, ideational and institutional aspects. Given the flaws and strengths of the approaches discussed above, we can see that an ideal solution would be an approach that consistently seeks a balance between taking account of both the nature of the structure of the international and regional system, and the ideational and unit-level factors that motivated and influenced foreign policy choices on the domestic and individual level. In other words, a theoretical framework that examines the international distribution of power, as well as the domestic perceptual, institutional, and social terrain.

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<sup>12</sup> Adib-Moghaddam, ‘Discourse and Violence: The friend-enemy conjunction in contemporary Iranian-American Relations,’ p.514

Consequently, this thesis utilises a modified neoclassical realist framework, one that maintains the importance of the systemic level in determining foreign policy choices, but at the same time integrates insights from FPA in acknowledgement of the key importance of domestic political factors in the determination of foreign policy, while at the same time seeking to integrate perceptual and ideological factors into its analysis. The following sections therefore discuss NCR and the nature of the specific borrowings from FPA used in this thesis, and why the two are compatible.

## 2.2 Neoclassical realism

To gain a proper understanding of NCR, one must understand how it relates to neorealism and ‘classical’ realism. It makes sense to begin with the shared characteristic of all three bodies of theory, namely the core element of realism, a commonality that is reflected most obviously in their titles. Like classical realism and neorealism, NCR holds to basic assumptions about the nature of international relations that are fundamental to the realist paradigm. NCR adherents Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro identify three of these core assumptions, and describe them in the following passage, which deserves to be quoted in full:

First, human beings cannot survive as individuals, but rather as members of larger groups that command their loyalty and provide some measure of security from external enemies. Tribalism is an immutable fact of political and social life. Thus all variants of realism are inherently group-centric. Second, politics is a perpetual struggle among self-interested groups under conditions of general scarcity and uncertainty. The scarce commodities in question might be material capabilities, or they might be social resources, such as prestige and status. Groups face pervasive uncertainty about one another’s present and future intentions. Third, power is a necessary requirement for any group to secure its goals, whether those goals are universal domination or simply self-preservation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman & Jeffrey Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.14 - 15

Additionally, like other modern realist theories, NCR is 'state-centric', and holds that competition for power and influence between states in an anarchic international system is the most significant feature that defines international politics.

Neoclassical realists hold a view of the international system that is strongly influenced by that of neorealism, in that they believe it forcefully incentivises a state's behaviour, rewarding or punishing in accordance with the dynamics of the system. Gideon Rose (who originally coined the term 'neoclassical realism' in 1998) argues that for adherents of NCR, "the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities."<sup>14</sup> This is therefore the 'independent variable' of NCR, in that it is the primary causal force in determining changes in its 'dependent variable,' a state's foreign policy. This has led some to claim that NCR is a logical extension of neorealism,<sup>15</sup> even though the two bodies of theory are separated by profound differences. Nonetheless, an important aspect of NCR is its reliance on systemic-level factors in explaining foreign policy. It is a state's place in the global system of states that is the most important factor in determining its foreign policy in the long term, setting the broad boundaries a state must operate within and determining what threats and opportunities it faces. For neoclassical realists, international systemic factors are inescapable because, speaking generally, in an anarchic system a relatively powerful state (in economic and military terms) has a wider field of action and more available options than less powerful ones, which will lack the capabilities that come with greater power, and other states will react to it in differently depending on its power capabilities.

Where NCR definitively parts company with neorealism is in its goals, its view of the importance of the units of the system and the consequences this has for its conception of anarchy. As already stated, while neorealism is a theory of international politics in the general sense, in that Waltz attempts to explain the nature

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<sup>14</sup> Gideon Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,' *World Politics*, 51 (1) 1998, p.146

<sup>15</sup> Brian Rathburn, 'A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism,' *Security Studies*, 17 (2) 2008, pp.294-321

of the international system,<sup>16</sup> NCR theories are theories of foreign policy. In this regard, its focus is on that of individual states and why they pursue particular policies in each specific instance. NCR approaches therefore typically utilise a multi-level analysis, one that scrutinises both the state unit and the system it is embedded in. As a consequence, NCR's view of states is highly differentiated, with each state host to important causal factors that are not necessarily products of the system of which the state forms a part. These factors are 'intervening variables,' between the independent (structural/systemic) and the dependent (foreign policy outcomes) variables. A state may therefore have a range of policy options open to it, which are determined by systemic factors, but which options in particular its leaders select may well be the product of these domestic factors, or 'intervening variables' to use the terminology of NCR. To use a simple analogy drawn from economics, while the demand is external, how the demand is supplied is affected by domestic modes of production. Therefore, while two states may face identical systemic challenges, they may adopt very different policies depending on their differing domestic features. In more specific terms, it is the decisions of foreign policymaking elites and the forces that affect them that are studied, as it is not states that make foreign policy decisions but their leaders. As a consequence of this, NCR differs in its view of anarchy. While it shares neorealism's view that the international system is anarchic, this anarchy is 'murky', or 'opaque', to return to Rose's terminology. The system is perceived by fallible human beings and therefore does not typically send clear, unambiguous and immediate signals to leaders, so states "must grope their way forward in twilight, interpreting partial and problematic evidence according to subjective rules of thumb"<sup>17</sup> (According to neoclassical realists, a state's foreign policy is typically formulated by a small group of senior leaders and officials, often referred to as the 'foreign policy executive' or, FPE).<sup>18</sup> The consequence is, arguably, a shift in emphasis from structural forces and towards human agency. For adherents of NCR and classical realism the emergence of balances of power, or attempts to disrupt and/or re-shape it therefore have a contingent component, and

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<sup>16</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p.121

<sup>17</sup> Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism', p.152

<sup>18</sup> For instance, see Steven Lobell, 'Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model,' in Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman, and Jeffrey Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

stem from the more-or-less conscious decisions of leaders to pursue these states of affairs as a matter of policy.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, it is objective material power capabilities which determine what policies states can employ, and in the long run these will prove to be decisive in shaping the overall direction of policy. NCR therefore trades neorealism's theoretical parsimony for greater explanatory depth, and, arguably, the ability to deal with situations that represent anomalies for neorealism.

However, another question arises which should be addressed: why call it 'neoclassical'? What exactly is 'new' about it? As we have seen, NCR is substantially different from neorealism, yet we have not discussed what differentiates it from the vast and diverse body of literature that is grouped together as 'classical realism'. Rose addresses this issue also. He too, asks "why must we add yet another bit of jargon to an already burgeoning lexicon"? before supplying an answer: "unfortunately there *is* no simple, straightforward classical realism".<sup>20</sup> In other words, classical realism resembles more than anything else a philosophical tradition, a way of looking at the world, rather than a research program. This is, of course, not necessarily a flaw, but it is a very different state of affairs from that of NCR. NCR theories all share a basic model, a model with distinctions between independent variables, intervening variables and dependent variables and the role of each. The relationship between the independent and dependent variables is essentially fixed, with the role played by the intervening variables requiring the most examination, usually through empirical case studies. Adherents of NCR are therefore distinct from classical realists because they follow a fundamentally different project, one which they claim aspires to "greater methodological sophistication".<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, while NCR shares classical realism's sensitivity to state-society relations and its focus on foreign policy outcomes rather than the international system, it does take a different view of the latter, one heavily influenced by neorealism. Neoclassical realists "begin with the fundamental

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<sup>19</sup> Adam Quinn, *US Foreign Policy in Context: National Ideology from the founders to the Bush Doctrine* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2010), p.12

<sup>20</sup> Rose 'Neoclassical Realism,' p.153

<sup>21</sup> Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, The State, and Foreign Policy*, p.19

assumption of neorealists that the international system structures and constrains the policy choices of states.”<sup>22</sup> This is a legacy of Waltzian neorealism, one not present in the work of scholars in the traditions of classical realism, but central to NCR. Overall, “[w]hat makes neoclassical realism ‘new’ is its ongoing attempt to systematise the wide and varied insights of classical realists within parsimonious theory, or to put in in reverse, to identify the appropriate intervening variables that can imbue realism’s structural variant with a greater explanatory richness.”<sup>23</sup>

The close kinship between NCR and classical realism raises an important question: why use NCR rather than an approach rooted in classical realism? The insights offered by structural realism are too valuable to ignore. As discussed above, neorealist theory is not sufficient to explain why the US pursued a dual containment policy towards Iran and Iraq in the post-Cold War era. It explains why it was possible for the US to do so, but this is not the same as explaining why this *particular* substantial and wide-ranging policy was adopted and implemented. This is obviously not sufficient if we wish to attain a deeper understanding of the issue. However, at the same time, it is not desirable to ‘throw the baby out with the bathwater’ and entirely reject any of the insights that structural realism offers, given its usefulness in explaining the particular dynamics of the Persian Gulf sub-region and the unipolar nature of global politics in the post-Cold War era. NCR is better constituted to take account of this need, as it allows us to integrate the systemic and the domestic, and the material and the ideational, while remaining theoretically coherent and consistent. From a purely instrumental perspective, NCR is also arguably somewhat more rigorous than classical realism. It has an explicit model that will make investigation and analysis easier without doing excessive violence to the facts and the standards of scholarship.

In sum, NCR is a valid compromise between the need for theoretical rigour and admission of the messier aspects of real-world foreign policy choices. It allows us to acknowledge that there were important structural factors that went some way

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<sup>22</sup> Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, The State, and Foreign Policy*, p.19

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Kitchen, ‘Systemic pressures and domestic ideas: a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation,’ *Review of International Studies*, 36 (1) 2010, p.118.

towards determining the choice of dual containment by the US, but also encourages further investigation into the specific factors in play in American foreign policymaking, factors that were the most likely to be decisive in the adoption of dual containment specifically.

## **2.3 Intervening variables – perceptions and resource extraction**

Intervening variables are, as already stated, the defining features of any NCR analysis, and as such form a critical part of any foreign policy analysis influenced in whole or part by NCR. From a theoretical perspective, they are required to bridge the gap between theory and policy, and show how the pressures of the international system are translated into foreign policy. As a consequence, the exploration of the intervening variables behind dual containment will form a major part of this thesis. It will therefore be useful to examine how other scholars have defined and investigated various intervening variables in the course of their own research, in the hope that this might assist in the identification of variables that may also be at work in the case of dual containment. In particular, I will focus here on the four texts identified by Rose in his 1998 article, which arguably constitute the core of the ‘third wave’ of contemporary NCR scholarship, and some complementary later work but the same authors.<sup>24</sup> The following survey demonstrates that, broadly speaking, previous studies utilising NCR as a theoretical framework have sought to explain foreign policies in reference to the perceptions of leaders and key political figures, and/or the ability of governments to mobilise state resources and the ‘distorting’ effect of the necessity of doing so on the ensuing policy. The latter is sometimes referred to as ‘state power,’ meaning the ability of the official bodies (‘the state’) to extract from society the means to pursue its preferred policies. The following survey will demonstrate the application of NCR to specific cases, illustrating the approach described above, and offer points of comparison that demonstrate the origins and derivation of the modified framework used in this study as a whole.

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<sup>24</sup> Rose, ‘Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,’ p.156

An obvious place to begin is the work of Fareed Zakaria, who also sought to study US foreign policy from a realist perspective, tracing the changes in American foreign policy during its rise to great power status between 1865 and 1908.<sup>25</sup> In doing so, he sought to test realist hypotheses about the relationship between the expansion of a state's material power and its interests abroad. From a theoretical perspective, his work is significant because of his development of the NCR theory of 'state-centred realism,' which he posited in opposition to 'defensive realism', as advocated by scholars such as Walt.<sup>26</sup> Zakaria seeks to test realist claim that, in general, states expand their foreign policy ambitions roughly in step with the advance of their material power.<sup>27</sup> However, the experience of the rapidly-industrialising US at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> is something of an anomaly if we accept this claim. While the US economy grew at a breakneck pace following the end of the Civil War, the US, in Zakaria's words, "hewed to a relatively isolationist line, with few exceptions, until the 1890s – a highly unusual gap between power and interests, for it lasted some thirty years."<sup>28</sup> To explain this failure to adopt a more activist foreign policy, he introduces domestic, intervening variables.

Zakaria holds that the key variables in this case is the power, or lack thereof, of the state (hence 'state-centred realism') to use national resources to pursue foreign policy goals, and the perceptions of leaders charged with making and executing foreign policy of the extent of this power. In his words, "State power is the portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which the central decision-makers can achieve their ends."<sup>29</sup> According to Zakaria's account, the US was held back from pursuing a more active role abroad because it was a 'weak' state, where the central government's key policymakers (in this case the executive branch of the federal government) lacked the authority and autonomy to pursue their foreign policy objectives. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century wore on, the

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<sup>25</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998)

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987)

<sup>27</sup> Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, p.19

<sup>28</sup> Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, p.5

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p.9



capabilities and responsibilities of the American federal government grew, as did the authority of the Presidency over Congress and the Senate, which enabled leaders with ambitious and activist foreign policies (e.g. Presidents McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt) to put them into effect, converting American industrial and financial resources into military power, overseas possessions and international influence. Consequently, Zakaria reserves a critical role for the perception of 'state power' by policymaking elites in the expansion of a state's foreign commitments. A perceived increase in 'state power' by a leadership cadre will result, in Zakaria's model, in an expansion of that state's interests abroad, and the adoption of correspondingly ambitious foreign policies.

Another scholar who gives serious consideration to the perceptions of policymakers in the formation of policy is William Wohlforth. In his study of the role of perceptions of the balance of power on Soviet foreign policymaking he details the problems faced by scholars who try to explain the role of power in international politics while relying on it as a causal factor, and advances some arguments in favour of making a careful study of policymaker's perceptions of power.<sup>30</sup> Wohlforth maintains that while realists rely on the distribution of power between states to explain interactions between them, it is extremely difficult to pin down exactly how and why this is the case in particular instances. This difficulty extends to attempts to produce a convincing definition of power that can be empirically validated without trying to understand the perceptions of the individuals involved.

Wohlforth argues that no definition of the balance of power is ever strictly 'objective' in the sense that it cannot be understood wholly separately from the phenomena it seeks to explain. In particular, "Theorists in the realist or balance-of-power tradition are virtually unanimous in their insistence on defining power as capabilities", by which he means the ability to use force. However, the only way to validate this hypothesis is to use outcomes as empirical proof, which results in circularity of a kind: "A relationship of power can never be known until after power

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<sup>30</sup> William Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press, 1993)

has been exercised. Under such a definition, it is impossible to distinguish a given relationship of power from the outcome produced or influenced by that relationship, since the former will have to be inferred from the latter.”<sup>31</sup> While we may be able to make general observations about the role of power distribution in international politics, to understand particular policies we must seek detailed knowledge of how policymakers perceived their environment if any conclusions we draw regarding these policies are to be valid: “What, if not hindsight, gives the scholar remote in place and time from the events she analyses a special insight into the distribution of capabilities, not possessed by the participants themselves?”<sup>32</sup>

The perception of power therefore plays a key role in explaining the end of the Cold War in Wohlforth’s eyes. The decision by the Soviet leadership to move away from confrontation and revisionism and adopt a more conciliatory set of foreign policies was driven to a large extent by their perception of the decline of the USSR’s military and economic power relative to its rivals. This manifested partly as a shift away from a view of military force as the ultimate arbiter in international politics, towards a view similar to that of ‘defensive realism,’ namely that Soviet military power bred unease in other states, which in turn balanced against the Soviet Union and strengthened the hand of its main rival, the US. This became more apparent as the Cold War began to ‘wind down’ towards the latter half of the 1980s.<sup>33</sup> The trend towards this policy can in turn be explained by the inherent uncertainties and inaccuracies in the act of perceiving and judging power, which are themselves rooted in human nature: “What “power” is is determined in part by how given material distributions are interpreted. Since many interpretations are always possible, state leaderships will tend to interpret particular changes opportunistically.”<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere, defending realism from charges that it ‘failed’ to predict the end of the Cold War, he is more concise: “In the case of the Soviet Union and the Cold War’s end, perceived relative decline was a necessary condition for the

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<sup>31</sup> William Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance*, p.4

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.6

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.267

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.303

adoption of perestroika and “new thinking” and decline was connected to the burdens imposed by the Soviet Union’s international position.”<sup>35</sup>

Following on from this, it makes sense to turn to the works of Randall Schweller, another influential author within the NCR paradigm. In particular, the implications of his work for the role of the perceptions of threat in policymaking. This revolved around an attempt to understand the phenomenon of ‘underbalancing,’ which Schweller defined as when states fail “to recognise a clear and present danger or, more typically still, have responded in paltry and imprudent ways.”<sup>36</sup> As with Zakaria, Schweller’s study of ‘underbalancing’ is not at first glance immediately applicable to a study of dual containment. Nevertheless, Schweller’s work is, like Zakaria’s and Wohlforth’s, useful because it introduces concepts and avenues of investigation that are relevant to dual containment. Like other studies within the NCR trend, Schweller seeks to examine how pressures and incentives generated by the international system are translated into foreign policy by states and their leaders. Similarly to scholars of NCR, he attempts to do this by analysing the nature of the state unit, specifically its decision-making actors and process. He concludes that foreign policy decision-making is influenced heavily by what he refers to as ‘state coherence,’ the ability of a state’s policymakers to act rationally and consistently. States are more likely to ‘underbalance’ when they are insufficiently coherent to enact foreign policies that address an external threat. In pursuing this line of enquiry, Schweller admits that “states respond (or not) to threats and opportunities in ways determined by both internal and external considerations of policy elites, who must reach consensus within an often decentralised and competitive political process.”<sup>37</sup>

Schweller derives ‘state coherence’ from four sources: elite cohesion, elite consensus, government/regime vulnerability and cohesion within society at large. ‘Elite cohesion’ is the degree to which a state’s leadership is fractured or polarised

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<sup>35</sup> William Wohlforth, ‘Realism and the End of the Cold War’, *International Security*, 19 (3) 1995, p.109

<sup>36</sup> Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p.1

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.5

by internal divisions at fundamental levels, while ‘elite consensus’ refers to both the level of agreement within the policymaking elite(s) of a state that something represents a threat or opportunity, and what policy outcomes are the most desirable. ‘Regime vulnerability’ describes how far policymakers must take domestic dangers into account in the forming of foreign policy - at one extreme, will a particular policy threaten the legitimacy of the regime (or the popularity of a particular government) to such an extent that it will fall? Finally, ‘social cohesion’ refers to “the relative strength of ties that bind individuals and groups to the core of a given society. Social cohesion does not mean political unanimity or the absence of deep political disagreements within society.”<sup>38</sup> Instead, it means how far the citizens of a state see the state itself as legitimate and representative of them, and not just a political entity they just happen to find themselves living in. Ultimately, the lower these values, the lower the coherence of the state. Likewise, the higher these values, the more coherent that state. The more coherent the state, the more likely it is to respond to shifts in the international system appropriately. The domestic political systems of states are therefore also an important factor in determining a given state’s foreign policy.

Schweller also includes another variable, namely the attitude of a state towards the current distribution of power in the system. Schweller posits that a fundamental cleavage exists that defines the outlook of states: bias towards either revisionism or the status quo. Further sub-divisions exist, but these are questions of degree: how much risk states are willing to assume in trying to change or defend the status quo, and how extensive their goals are- ‘unlimited’ or ‘limited’. Which of these a state tilts towards will determine how it views developments in the international system. This is also dealt with in his earlier work, which examined the structural causes of the Second World War.<sup>39</sup> Here, Schweller argued that the outbreak of this conflict was facilitated to a large degree by the instability in the international security system that was caused by shift to tripolarity, as a result of the rise of Germany in the 1930s, when it joined the existing polar powers of the United

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<sup>38</sup> Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*, p.51

<sup>39</sup> Randall Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler’s Strategy of World Conquest* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998)

States and the Soviet Union. This tripolar system, together with the ‘unlimited aims revisionism’ of Nazi Germany and the failure and/or inability of other states to balance against it enabled the war to happen. In this work, Schweller therefore adopts two intervening variables:

the inequalities of power among the Great Powers and their level of satisfaction with the status quo. These refinements transform neorealism from a theory of international politics to one of foreign policy. The amended theory, which I call balance-of-interests theory, yields more varied and determinate predictions about system dynamics and state behaviour and richer explanations of concrete historical cases than does Waltz’s theory.<sup>40</sup>

What lesson can be drawn from this? Arguably, that the perception of threat and opportunity plays a key role in foreign policymaking. This is most obvious in Schweller’s discussion of ‘underbalancing’. In an ambiguous world, how states respond to threats is determined to a large extent by the perceptions of their leaders of the magnitude and nature of the threat itself, or even if something poses a threat in the first place, as the act of perception is one that is riven with problems and vulnerable to distortion and error.<sup>41</sup> In Schweller’s model, elite consensus that a threat exists is therefore the “proximate causal variable”: without a strong consensus there will be no action. It is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for action.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, his introduction of the notion of a state’s ‘interests’, i.e. its attachment to (or disenchantment with) the status quo includes a strong element of threat perception. This can be found specifically in his categorisation of states according to the risks their leaders are willing to run in order to change the status quo, and also in the act of deciding something represents a threat to the status quo or an opportunity to challenge it.

Domestic political dynamics is the final intervening variable we must consider. While Schweller integrates this into his analysis to some extent, it is more prominent in the work of Thomas Christensen, most notably in his study of Sino-

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<sup>40</sup> Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances*, p.184-185

<sup>41</sup> Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*, p37 - 43

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.48

American relations in the early phases of the Cold War.<sup>43</sup> This is particularly useful from the perspective of this thesis because, like Zakaria, he deals extensively with American foreign policymaking, but in this case a more contemporary period (albeit one with significant differences from the 1990s). Christensen's work is therefore highly relevant, doubly so when we consider that it too is one of the 'founding texts' of NCR reviewed in Rose's article of 1998.

The essential claim of Christensen's work on Sino-American relations of this era is that these were shaped to a great extent by the need of leaders on both sides to appease various domestic political forces, and pursue foreign policies that were influenced by the desire to achieve their political agendas as much as responding to shifts in the international system. He argues that at times they resorted to 'overbalancing' in order to mobilise sufficient resources for foreign policy, even if the situation did not warrant such action when viewed dispassionately. In the first instance, Christensen analyses the approach of the Truman administration towards the nascent People's Republic of China (PRC). He argues that President Truman, his advisors and officials wished to pursue a conciliatory approach towards Chairman Mao's regime, and recognise the PRC as the official government of China once it had secured the Chinese mainland. In doing so, they hoped to drive a wedge between the PRC and the Soviet Union, seeing the latter as by far the bigger threat. However, Christensen contends that Truman's foreign policy became a victim of the administration's rhetoric. In order to 'sell' its activist foreign policies and provision of economic and military aid to Europe (especially the Marshall Plan), it was forced to rely heavily on a discourse of national security and the threat of international Communism. In doing so, the administration became trapped by the logic of the situation and the particular dynamics of the American political system in that era. It could hardly acquiesce to the victory of a communist movement over a wartime US ally (Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT) in China, while at the same time emphasising the need to contain communism in the rest of the world without appearing deeply hypocritical. Moreover, Truman relied on Congress to appropriate the vast sums necessary for his foreign policy and defence programmes, and was forced to grant

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilisation, and Sino-American Conflict 1947-1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996)

concessions to legislators who would only approve of this expenditure if the US took a more bellicose stand towards Communism in Asia. Consequently, Truman continued (amongst other measures) to provide military aid to the KMT even after he judged it a lost cause, and declined to recognise the PRC even though privately believing that it was in America's national interests to do so. This was complicated by the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950:

Unfortunately for Sino-American relations, the potential for being accused of hypocrisy was great during an expensive mobilisation drive backed by an ideological crusade. To avoid this crippling charge, the administration needed to demonstrate some degree of consistency between rhetoric and practice. Truman could not adopt a hands-off policy toward Taiwan, let alone a conciliatory policy toward Beijing, if he hoped to guarantee support for the Korean War and, more generally, to transform the fervour over Korea into broad popular support for larger security policy budgets.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, Christensen goes so far as to assert that this bellicosity had much to do with the Chinese decision to intervene in the conflict.<sup>45</sup> This in turn assisted Truman in justifying large increases in defence expenditure and assisted in the passage of the accompanying measures through Congress.<sup>46</sup>

Within the Chinese government, Christensen argues that Mao felt driven to manufacture the 1958 Taiwan Straits crisis in order to justify the radical changes of the 'Great Leap Forward.' In his analysis, Mao felt threatened by what he saw as the increasing power of the Soviet Union in the 1950s, which he feared would marginalise China. In order to compete on the world stage, he thought it necessary to increase China's material power capabilities, symbolised by the acquisition of nuclear weapons and rapid industrialisation. China was at the time still a largely rural society and lacked a sophisticated industrial and technological base, so this would require enormous economic sacrifices and social dislocation to achieve: "Almost every aspect of the Great Leap communization was unprecedented in Chinese history...The Great Leap Forward was nothing short of a social revolution.

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<sup>44</sup> Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, p.137

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.162

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.169 - 170

But it was more than a social oddity; it was an enormous physical and economic burden on the average Chinese citizen.”<sup>47</sup> In what came to be known as the 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis, Mao ordered the shelling and blockade of two KMT-held islands off the coast of China, Matsu and Quemoy, which dramatically raised tensions with Taiwan and the US. This, argues Christensen, was designed to foster a “siege mentality”<sup>48</sup> amongst the Chinese populace that would enable the mass mobilisations of the ‘Great Leap’ to take place, and justify the sacrifices the people of China were called upon to make. At the same time international tensions were carefully managed to avoid excessive escalation and the actual outbreak of war, as “Mao did not want war, just conflict. Conflict short of war would guarantee popular consensus for his broad economic strategy without wasting the mobilised resources on actual warfighting.”<sup>49</sup>

What do Christensen’s examples tell us? If we accept his arguments, then the domestic political system of a state is a key intervening variable in determining its foreign policy, as much as the perceptions of its elites or its material power capabilities. Not only does it go some way towards determining how a policy is presented and ‘sold’ to key figures and the populace, we can also see from the case of the Truman administration and its China policies (the most relevant example with regards to dual containment) that the administration was not only prevented from doing what it wanted to do, it was also pressured into doing things it didn’t. In other words, the nature of the American political system (combined with the ideological commitments of its actors) made certain policies essentially impossible to implement, and had a substantial impact on others.

Christensen and Schweller’s demonstration of the role of a state’s internal politics and political system, and Zakaria and Wohlforth’s demonstration of the importance of the perceptions of policymakers are persuasive examples of these intervening variables at work. These examples suggest that some key areas should be studied with regards to the examination of foreign policy, and American foreign

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<sup>47</sup> Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, p.213 - 214

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.9

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.219



policy in particular: the perceptions of relative American power and of the threat to American interests posed by Iran and Iraq on the part of key foreign policymakers, and the domestic political structure of the US and the balance of forces within it. The following section discusses how the theoretical framework utilised in this thesis does so by borrowing insights and concepts derived from FPA.

## **2.4 Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and neoclassical realism**

Scholars working in the FPA tradition locate the sources of a given state's foreign policies at the domestic, or 'unit' level, within a state and its government. Therefore, this body of work is a logical 'hunting ground' in which to seek relevant intervening variables. Although FPA focuses primarily on the 'unit level' of analysis, scholars working in this tradition have by no means disregarded wider questions about the relationship between systemic and domestic factors, and the relationship between them. As a result, many scholars working within the FPA tradition have advocated mixed models of foreign policy, with the integration of different levels of analysis, both at and above and below that of the state. This obviously corresponds strongly with the objectives and methods of NCR. Some of the work of Thomas Risse (together with his collaborators) is arguably very close to directions taken concurrently by scholars in the NCR school, especially the insistence that "[a] complex model of international politics has to be conceptualized which integrates the three levels of analysis: society, political system, and international environment."<sup>50</sup> Some of his earlier work, focusing on the effects of public opinion on the foreign policies of democratic states, offers two viable candidates for inclusion into an NCR framework as intervening variables: 'domestic structures' and 'coalition-building processes,'<sup>51</sup> which correspond (very roughly) to the distinction between 'agent' and 'structure' in the domestic political sphere. Risse

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<sup>50</sup> Harald Müller & Thomas Risse-Kappen, 'From the Outside In and from the Inside Out: International Relations, Domestic Politics, and Foreign Policy', in David Skidmore & Valerie Hudson (eds.) *The Limits of State Autonomy: Societal Groups and Foreign Policy Formulation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), p.31

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Risse-Kappen, 'Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies,' *World Politics*, 43 (4) 1991, pp.479-512

argues that these two ideas represent different approaches taken by scholars working in FPA, and should be integrated to provide a more complete picture.<sup>52</sup>

‘Domestic structures’ refers to “the nature of the political institutions (the “state”), basic features of the society, and the institutional and organizational arrangements linking state and society and channelling social demands into the political system.”<sup>53</sup> ‘Coalition-building processes’ (a term borrowed from Gourevitch)<sup>54</sup> encompass “policy networks,” in other words “the mechanisms and processes of interest representation by political parties and interest groups that link the societal environment to the political systems.”<sup>55</sup> As Risse concedes, ‘coalition-building processes’ and ‘domestic structures’ are closely interlinked because “state structures do not determine the specific content or direction of policies. On the other hand, coalition building takes place in the framework of political and societal institutions.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, the institutional context determines under what conditions a policy network or political coalition will be successful in its attempts to influence policy, and the means it has available in which to do so. Consequently, Risse argues that varying strength of states in the domestic sphere is a key determinant of foreign policy, and that states fall on a spectrum ranging from ‘strong’ to ‘weak’ in terms of “the centralization of state institutions...and the ability of political systems to control society and to overcome domestic resistance.”<sup>57</sup>

Overall, the framework advocated by Risse and others aims to measure the degree of relative autonomy a state enjoys vis-à-vis society. Risse, amongst others, argues that the US is an example of a relatively ‘weak’ state, one in which the foreign and security policymaking structure is decentralised, with a “federalist structure, the system of checks and balances between Congress and administration,

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<sup>52</sup> Risse-Kappen, ‘Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies,’ p.485-6

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.484

<sup>54</sup> Peter Gourevitch, ‘The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics,’ *International Organization*, 32 (4) 1978, pp.881-912

<sup>55</sup> Risse-Kappen, ‘Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies,’ p.485

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.485

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.484

and the extensive network of interest group representation.”<sup>58</sup> In comparison to other Western democracies, “the American system seems to come closest to the society-dominated type. Constant building and rebuilding of coalitions among social actors and political elites is fairly common even in foreign and security policy. The openness of the political system provides the society with comparatively easy access to the decision-making process.”<sup>59</sup> At the other end of the scale is the French Fifth Republic, which Risse argues the presidency has virtually unchallenged supremacy in the making of foreign and security policy (leading some observers of French politics to dub it a ‘nuclear monarchy’), with little input from the legislature or the public, making it a ‘strong’ state, at least in comparison to the US.<sup>60</sup> This view is derived from Krasner, for one, who argues that “The American state – those institutions that those institutions and roles that are relatively insulated from particularistic pressures and concerned with general goals (primarily the White House and the State Department and to a lesser extent the Treasury and Defense Departments) – is weak in relation to its own society.”<sup>61</sup> A ‘weak’ state is therefore one in which the central government is permeated by the influence of societal interest groups, perhaps the expense of the nation as a whole (Krasner cites pre-1975 Lebanon as an extreme example). In contrast, a state at the opposite end of the spectrum, a ‘strong’ state, is “one which is able to remake the society and culture in which it exists: that is, to change economic institutions, values, and patterns of interaction among private groups.”<sup>62</sup>

There are obvious parallels between the projects advocated by Risse and his colleagues in FPA and the approach taken by scholars in the NCR tradition described above, especially Zakaria, Christensen, and Schweller. For instance, the ‘resource extraction’ aspect of NCR correlates strongly with the notion of relative autonomy

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<sup>58</sup> Müller & Risse-Kappen, ‘From the Outside In and from the Inside Out: International Relations, Domestic Politics, and Foreign Policy’, p.34

<sup>59</sup> Risse-Kappen, ‘Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies,’ p.490-1

<sup>60</sup> Risse-Kappen, ‘Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies,’ p.491

<sup>61</sup> Stephen Krasner, *Power, the State, and Sovereignty: Essays on International Relations* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2009), p.37.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.42

(i.e. the power of the state in relation to society), as both approaches seek to explain foreign policy outcomes in regards to the ability of elites and leaders to mobilise national assets to achieve their ends. In the words of Amon and Alden, “Neoclassical realism’s integration of ‘intervening variables’ such as the role of perception, the role of leadership and domestic structures found within particular state actors as an explanatory source for diversity of outcomes in international politics brings these three crucial FPA insights into the realist theoretical paradigm.”<sup>63</sup> They therefore conclude that the scope for the development of greater theoretical depth in NCR through “careful ‘borrowing’” from FPA is “wide”, despite the central role of the international system in NCR theory.<sup>64</sup> More recent research in NCR has arguably approached the integration of the type advocated by Risse even further, through attempts to construct theories of the role of contestation between ‘the state’ and ‘society,’ and how this modulates systemic pressures and determine foreign policy outcomes. Lobell, for instance, theorises on the interaction of social forces, state structures and perceptions at the level of the state and constructs an intricate model of threat identification by elites across international, regional and domestic levels.<sup>65</sup> His model allows for the contestation of perceptions of threat by different actors within a state, such as between the core foreign policy executive and societal leaders, who may each have a different set of priorities or concerns, which does much to shape their perceptions. He cites the example of societal leaders who assess a foreign state based on its threats to their parochial interests rather than the nation as a whole, which makes the ‘domestic balance of power’ a factor in policymaking if they are able to influence the process, especially in the economic sphere. Consequently, “Societal leaders will seek to identify and brand states that have a component of power that harms their parochial interests as a national threat.”<sup>66</sup> This leads him to identify three scenarios. In the first, the perceptions of the foreign policy executive (FPE) and societal elites align, leading to a relatively seamless process of the formation and adoption of an appropriate policy. In the

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<sup>63</sup> Chris Alden & Amon Aran, *Foreign Policy Analysis: New Approaches* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p.117

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.118

<sup>65</sup> Steven Lobell, ‘Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model,’ in Lobell, Ripsman, Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p.60

second scenario, there is some discord between the two sides, ensuring that the FPE is somewhat autonomous, but faces some constraints on its policy. In the third scenario, changes in the external environment are interpreted in significantly different ways, which “disables a foreign policy coalition”, constrains the FPE in its threat identification and leads to inappropriate counterbalancing.<sup>67</sup> Ripsman also seeks to determine which societal interest groups, and under which conditions, are able to influence the foreign policy of their state. Rather than perceptions, he focuses more attention on the structure of the state and social forces seeking to influence policy. He subsequently theorises that in democracies with powerful legislatures that face minor external security threats, influential domestic interest groups will be able to have substantial impacts on policy.<sup>68</sup>

Given the compatibility of these concepts with an NCR framework, and their importance in the American case, ‘domestic structures’ and ‘coalition-building processes’ are integrated into a wider NCR framework in this thesis as intervening variables. This is not to say that Risse’s recommendations have been adopted wholesale. One of the factors Risse and other FPA scholars, such as Gourevitch and Katzenstein, have highlighted, the degree to which a society is fragmented or polarised,<sup>69</sup> has been excluded for two reasons. Firstly, to remain as theoretically parsimonious as possible and maintain a manageable number of variables, and secondly (and more importantly) because this can arguably be incorporated into the ‘coalition building processes’ and ‘domestic structures’ sections without serious loss or distortion: the degree to which groups in society disagree about policies will operate within a context determined by the states domestic institutional structures, and the contestation of different societal actors and will be reflected in the policy coalitions contending to shape policy. It can also, in part, be accommodated within the broader perceptual variable, with the different perceptions of different social and official state actors examined together. This difference is therefore largely one of

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<sup>67</sup> Lobell, ‘Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model,’ p.66

<sup>68</sup> Norrin Ripsman, ‘Neoclassical realism and domestic interest groups,’ in Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*

<sup>69</sup> Discussed by Risse in ‘Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies,’ p.486. As mentioned above, this is a feature also considered by Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*

organisation. In terms of where this framework differs most markedly from an FPA analysis, it, like all realist theories, accords more weight to systemic, structural factors and less to those rooted in the psychology of decision-making of individual policy-makers and groups. This thesis also breaks with some of the work of other NCR scholars in examining domestic structures and the policy coalitions separately. Ripsman, for instance, treats the legislature as another kind of interest group, on the grounds that “while organised interest groups can make representations directly to the political leadership, they frequently have easier access through the legislature. Thus a theory that specifies the extent and nature of the legislature’s influence on policy will be relevant to all of these domestic political actors.”<sup>70</sup> This might suffice for determining broad outlines of state-society contestation in the making of policies on a large scale, but it is a less useful approach in the case of a specific policy like dual containment. While the domestic institutional structures of a state may determine the means and degree to which interest groups (or other social groups and forces) may influence policy, it does not determine why some groups are successful and others are not in different cases.<sup>71</sup> The influence of the legislature itself may also vary in different eras and on different issues, making a more in-depth study of legislative/institutional structure a significant variable in and of itself in regards to specific policies. The impact of the domestic structures and coalition building processes are therefore examined in separate chapters.

The thesis therefore examines three intervening variables in total: the perceptions of threat and power of American policymakers, the effect of the domestic institutional framework of the American federal government, and the influence of social and political coalitions (like interest groups) on dual containment policy. This is preceded by an analysis of the international context in which the policy of dual containment was conceived and carried out, in terms of both the American approach to the Persian Gulf in the wider context of its global policies as a superpower, and the realities arising from regional inter-state factors which

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<sup>70</sup> Ripsman, ‘Neoclassical realism and domestic interest groups,’ p.171

<sup>71</sup> Risse-Kappen, ‘Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies,’ p.485

American policy attempts to address. Taken together, the latter two aim to address the international systemic factors shaping American policy in the 1990s.

## **2.5 Conclusions**

NCR is a relatively new and highly-promising variant on the long-standing ‘realist’ tradition of IR theory, as part of a new resurgence of interest in Realism in contemporary IR. In terms of its goals and objectives, it breaks with the neorealism advocated by scholars like Kenneth Waltz, its most immediate predecessor in chronological terms, in its insistence on the desirability of developing a general theory of international politics that can also offer insights into specific foreign policies. Scholars working in NCR attempt to do so by integrating unit-level variables into their analysis rather than relying predominantly upon the systemic incentives of the struggle for power and security between states as neorealists do. Adherents of NCR conceptualise these ‘intervening variables,’ falling between the independent variable of the international system and its systemic incentives and the dependent variable of foreign policy outcomes, as ‘transmission belts’ that shape and condition the response of states and their elites to the international system. Remaining within the broader realist paradigm, they reserve an important role for the power capabilities of states (which, like other realists, they also view as the central focus of IR study), with more powerful states able to access a wider range of policy options thanks to their position in the international system, and also view states as, in general, aiming for power-optimisation, acting usually to advance their own interests in a fundamentally anarchic system.

While previous studies which have utilised theoretical frameworks derived from NCR have tended to break down into two broad strands – ‘resource extraction’ and ‘perceptual’ models, the framework utilized in this thesis attempts to bridge the gap between them. It does so by bringing in some insights from the IR sub-field of FPA, specifically the idea of the relative autonomy of the state and its FPE vis-à-vis society. However, rather than relying on this as a separate intervening variable, here it is disaggregated into the two components identified by Risse, namely ‘domestic structures’ and ‘coalition building processes’. In contrast, perceptions of threat and

power on the part of policymakers (American, in the case of dual containment) are dealt with in one variable, though many NCR theorists regard them as key. This stems from the relatively narrow focus of this thesis, specifically one (albeit major) foreign policy, in one region, and in one decade, and primarily under one government (both Clinton administrations). This approach, while relatively novel in theoretical terms, is possible thanks to the convergence of aims and methods in both NCR and the approach promoted by Risse et al.

With a theoretical framework in place, it is now possible to begin the examination of dual containment in earnest. The following chapter examines the background of US. foreign policy in the Persian Gulf in the second half of the twentieth century, and the international factors that shaped it.





## **CHAPTER 3 US Foreign Policy in the Persian Gulf 1945-1991**

This chapter discusses the evolution of American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf in the post-war era, up until the end of the Cold War and the introduction of dual containment. From the perspective of the NCR theory utilised in this thesis, it aims to demonstrate the international, global factors driving American involvement in the region, and discuss the structural, systemic aspects of American Middle East and Persian Gulf policy. In other words, its role is to describe how the superpower status of the US, and its wider concerns stemming from this position in the international system, has shaped American Persian Gulf policy.

The chapter will show how US Persian Gulf policy has changed in this period, and, more importantly, illustrate the 'push' factors that motivated American policymakers to maintain their country's involvement in Gulf politics, and made them responsive to appeals by regional states for assistance. The strong ties between Israel and the US are also discussed, but it is argued that these are essentially secondary in the wider perspective, as the US involved itself in the Persian Gulf for other reasons, rather than as corollary to its relationship with Israel, though of course connections existed, and will be discussed briefly. The chapter argues that it was the Cold War itself, and the presence of oil in vast quantities, that were responsible for American involvement in the first place, predating the foundation of the state of Israel.

In seeking to accomplish objectives related to these concerns, the US intervened directly as well as relying on proxies. Examples of both will be discussed in this chapter, as will the bilateral relations between the US and the three largest Gulf States, Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Generally speaking, the US preferred to maintain a relatively low-key role in the region, maintaining only a token military presence geared towards 'showing the flag' rather than playing a major role in regional security. Instead, the US relied on first the UK, then regional surrogates to ensure the security of its interests. It was only when the US ran out of surrogates and the Cold War wound down that American

policymakers opted for a large American presence. The chapter therefore examine each of the primary US interests and the role they played in determining American approaches to the Persian Gulf in turn (with the partial exception of Israel). This is followed by an examination of American strategies, including its reliance on regional proxies.

### **3.1 American interests in the Persian Gulf**

As far as a consensus can be said to exist in such matters, a consensus exists among scholars that the most important American interests in the Middle East (up to the end of the Cold War) were containing Soviet power, the free flow of oil, and Israel. Regarding the first, between the end of the Second World War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, minimising the presence and influence of the USSR in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf in particular was an overriding priority for American policymakers, determined by the global rivalry between the two superpowers. As to the second, the oil reserves present in the Persian Gulf assumed an increasingly critical role in the economies of the developed, industrialised states throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Finally, the intense American relationship with Israel also became increasingly important to American policymakers, partly for its perceived strategic utility and partly for reasons that had much to do with American domestic politics.

The rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated global politics in the second half of the twentieth century. While some scholars have argued that the direct impact of the Cold War on the Middle East and the Persian Gulf was surprisingly small in terms of direct superpower presence<sup>1</sup> (at least in comparison to other regions),<sup>2</sup> the Cold War nonetheless had an enormous impact on American foreign policy, with profound indirect consequences for regional states. This fact arguably hindered the formulation of

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Fred Halliday, 'The Middle East, the Great Powers and the Cold War', in Yezid Sayigh & Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), and *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.123-129

<sup>2</sup> For example, Asia ('hot' wars in Vietnam and Korea), and Europe (the American presence as part of NATO and the division of the continent)

appropriate regional policies by the US, as it imposed a “Cold War framework upon this complex mosaic that distorted the realities of the situation and encouraged inappropriate responses.”<sup>3</sup> The over-arching American policy was to contain the Soviet Union, which was played out on a global scale with little attention played to the regional dynamics of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East.

The Persian Gulf was indubitably seen by American policymakers as an area of vital strategic interest to the national security of the United States. Palmer argues that this began simply with the Persian Gulf as another arena for East-West confrontation, with the Soviet refusal to withdraw from Iran in 1946, together with Soviet pressure on Turkey and support for communist guerrillas in Greece’s civil war.<sup>4</sup> As Taylor argues, “The overriding concern of American foreign policy in the immediate postwar period was finding an effective way to check Soviet expansionism throughout the world.”<sup>5</sup> This attitude changed swiftly, taking into account the presence of what is now known to be approximately 60% of the world’s proven oil reserves in the area, which the US judged to be of inestimable strategic value in any confrontation with the Soviet Union. American planners considered it essential that this resource be either inaccessible to the USSR, freely accessible to the West, or both. This also precluded the domination of the Gulf by any hostile power, external or regional, which could undermine the ability of the West to confront the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> While the US had been able to fuel the Allied war machine in the Second World War, it quickly became apparent that it alone would not be able to continue its wartime role as the oil well of the ‘free world.’<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Western Europe and Japan would have to rely on Persian Gulf sources to fuel their economic

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Dobson & Steve Marsh, *U.S. Foreign Policy since 1945*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 119

<sup>4</sup> Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America’s Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1992), p.35

<sup>5</sup> Alan Taylor, *The Superpowers and the Middle East* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991) p.49

<sup>6</sup> Shibley Telhami, *The Stakes: America and the Middle East, The Consequences of Power and the Choice for Peace* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), p.140-3

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1991), p.395

recovery and opposition to the USSR. By 1948, the oil of the Persian Gulf had therefore become a necessary component of America's Cold War strategy, and essentially a strategic commodity rather than a strictly commercial one.<sup>8</sup> This view would persist throughout the Cold War and ensured that the US would remain engaged with the Persian Gulf, alert to any developments that threatened to increase Soviet influence in the region. In Yergin's words: "To the United States, the oil resources of the region constituted an interest no less vital, in its own way, than the independence of Western Europe; and the Middle Eastern oil fields had to be preserved and protected on the Western side of the Iron Curtain to assure the economic survival of the entire Western world."<sup>9</sup>

The centrality of oil to modern society, as a fuel for transport and electricity generation, and as a raw material, is difficult to overstate. As described above, its centrality ensured that it was seen as an irreplaceable strategic asset as much as a commodity and a source of wealth creation. However, leaving aside the Cold War, access to oil was recognised as vital to economic development at the end of the Second World War among the states of the West and Japan, and this became more pressing as demand for it grew in the post-war era. While coal had fuelled the industrial revolution and still supplied the industrialised world with much of its energy for a short period after 1945, this changed swiftly:

in the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s, economic growth throughout the industrial world was powered by cheap oil. In a mere two decades, a massive change in the underpinnings of industrial society had taken place. On a global basis, coal had provided two-thirds of world energy in 1949. By 1971, oil, along with natural gas, was providing two-thirds of world energy.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most important consequences of this change was to focus the minds of western leaders on the security of supplies from the Persian Gulf. As described above, the Cold War gave this an added impetus and the resources of

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<sup>8</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.41-2 and p.44-5

<sup>9</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, p.427

<sup>10</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, p.456

the Persian Gulf an added weight. This remained true even in the minds of American policymakers, despite the fact that American oil production remained substantial in absolute terms throughout the twentieth century. This can be partly explained by the fact that American oil production peaked in the 1960s, together with a general trend for a growth in demand both in the US and worldwide.<sup>11</sup> It had been recognised among American policymakers as far back as the 1940s that the centre of gravity of world oil production was inexorably shifting towards the Persian Gulf.<sup>12</sup> In fact, of all the oil discovered worldwide between 1948 and 1972, more than 70 percent was in the Middle East, raising the Persian Gulf's proven reserves from 28 to 367 billion barrels.<sup>13</sup>

The cutting-off of Persian Gulf oil supplies to the economies of the West therefore represented a 'nightmare scenario' for Western policymakers, both economically and strategically. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden likened the possibility to being 'strangled to death', and agreed with President Eisenhower prior to an Anglo-Soviet summit in 1956 that he would warn Soviet leaders that any attempt by them to interfere in the flow of oil from the Middle East would likely lead to war. Yergin argues that it was fears of this coming to pass that prompted Eden to attack Egypt in the wake of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, to prevent either the waterway being closed to UK-bound tankers, or Nasser's defiance of the West inspiring other radicals in the region to take power and embargo shipments. Likewise, it was partly Eisenhower's fears of the consequences a nationalist, anti-Western backlash that prompted him to force Britain, France and Israel to back down.<sup>14</sup> It also demonstrates the complications that America's relationship with Israel caused to its attempts to maintain an anti-Soviet consensus and secure the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf.

While American goals regarding the Cold War and the global oil supply were closely interconnected, the same cannot be said for either of these two goals and the American-Israeli relationship. While developments in the politics of the

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<sup>11</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, p.567-8

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.393

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.500

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.484-5

region demonstrated that linkages existed between the traditional triad of American goals, these were not mutually-reinforcing in the same way. In aiding Israel, the US alienated those Arab states that resent its dispossession of the Palestinians and see it as an alien intrusion into the Arab/Islamic world, and therefore complicates the American relationship with the major oil producers of the Persian Gulf. As stated, the US support for the littoral Gulf Arab states, and pre-revolutionary Iran, preceded the foundation of Israel: prior the end of the Second World War, President Franklin Roosevelt agreed to extend the Lend-Lease programme to both Iran and Saudi Arabia, and his famous meeting with King Ibn Saud aboard the USS Quincy in February 1945 was undertaken partly out of the recognition that the US would play a role in the region following the conclusion of the war against the Axis powers.<sup>15</sup> The most significant example of the friction between the US and the littoral Arab states was the oil embargo that followed the 1973 October War, when the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) states embargoed oil shipments to the US (among others) in protest at its material support for Israel, and to pressure American leaders to broker a peace agreement. Simultaneously, the broader Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) raised oil prices sharply. However, although the immediate effects of this course of action were dramatic, the embargo itself lasted less than a year and relations between Saudi Arabia and the US, and between Israel and the US, remain strong to the present day. Arguably, both the Saudis and the US had too much invested in their relationship to allow it to be undermined by this issue alone: Saudi Arabia's economy is wholly dependent on exporting oil, and the survival of its existing political system relies on the profits.<sup>16</sup> An embargo (and alienating its superpower patron), or prohibitive pricing policies, would have negative consequences in the long term, motivating its customers to conserve energy and explore alternative fuels. It would also, from the Saudi perspective, jeopardise the security relationship it has relied upon since the Second World War.

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<sup>15</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.24 and p.28

<sup>16</sup> See Tim Niblock's *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006)

In addition, while Israel was also seen during the Cold War as a 'strategic asset', this did not come to the fore until twenty years after the state's founding, after its military successes in the 1967 Six Day War.<sup>17</sup> However, this too was a liability for the US, as it hampered American attempts to enlist Arab states in anti-Soviet alliances, both because they saw Israel as the greater threat, and ensured that they viewed the US, Israel's patron, with suspicion. Arguably, it was Egyptian-Israeli antagonism that sunk any chance of an amicable relationship between Nasser and Washington,<sup>18</sup> which was one of the reasons for Egypt's 'tilt' towards the USSR.

### **3.2 American strategies in the Gulf**

Given the nature of American interests in the Persian Gulf, and the context in which it was made (the Cold War), we can therefore see that American involvement in the region was likely to be enduring. This proved to be the case, as this section will describe. Nonetheless, despite having the resources of a superpower at its disposal, for much of the Cold War Washington opted to maintain a relatively low-key presence in the Persian Gulf, especially in military terms. While the US did intervene directly in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East at different times, it relied heavily on proxies, regional allies that shared its goals (or at least had converging interests) and could be relied upon to fulfil American objectives.

There are several plausible reasons for this. Firstly, the Cold War imposed its own demands. The nature of the American-Soviet rivalry was global in scope, and so even a superpower like the US had to pick and choose where it would involve itself with 'boots on the ground.' Compared to the huge American military commitment to the defence of Western Europe and the Mediterranean, the presence of permanent US forces in the Persian Gulf

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Falk, 'U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East: The Tragedy of Persistence', in Hooshang Amirahmadi (ed.), *The United States and the Middle East: A Search for New Perspectives* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), p.70

<sup>18</sup> Richard Cottam, 'U.S. Policy in the Middle East,' in Amirahmadi (ed.), *The United States and the Middle East*, p.41; Lawrence Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East*, (London: Wiedenfield & Nicolson, 2008), p.20



remained small until the 1990s. Therefore, while the Persian Gulf was perceived by Washington to be vital, the main focus of Cold War rivalry proved to be Europe, balancing the Soviet presence in the eastern half of the continent. Secondly, the Cold War ensured that the Soviet Union would attempt to match American efforts in different regions of the world, in an attempt to prevent its rival from pulling too far ahead. It therefore made sense for American policymakers to seek a trade-off between security and escalating rivalry to dangerous levels,<sup>19</sup> especially in a region like the Persian Gulf that was relatively close to the south-western borders of the USSR, and where there was a minor Soviet 'footprint,' which, as noted above, was marginal compared to the European theatre. Finally, regional states have been traditionally reluctant to host large numbers of foreign troops on their soil, especially from Israel's principal ally, unless it was judged to be absolutely necessary for national or regime survival.<sup>20</sup> As we shall see below, the US also placed importance on the British role in the Persian Gulf, which allowed Washington to minimise the American role in the region, until the British withdrawal in 1971. Nonetheless, the US maintained a token permanent military presence in the Persian Gulf of varying sizes between 1945 and 1991, as well as relying extensively on regional allies to uphold the primacy of pro-western and anti-Soviet forces.

### **3.2.1 Regional proxies and a British junior partner**

An important aspect of American Persian Gulf policy in the postwar era was the reliance on Britain continuing its pre-war role in regional security. Therefore, whatever the motivations of the British leadership in maintaining a security role in the Persian Gulf, the UK arguably acted as a surrogate of the US in purely functional terms. Due to mutual interests, Washington recognised that the defence of the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East was Britain's responsibility, until the UK finally surrendered this role in the face of mounting economic problems in 1971, a move that forced Washington to reconsider its Persian Gulf policy. Despite the Suez Crisis of 1956, the US and UK cooperated

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<sup>19</sup> Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, p.126

<sup>20</sup> Naef Bin Ahmed Al-Saud, 'Underpinning Saudi National Security Strategy,' *Joint Force Quarterly*, no.32, 2002, p.125-6

closely throughout this era to maintain pro-western forces in power and exclude Soviet influence.<sup>21</sup> As such, in the wake of the Second World War, the US looked to Britain “to shoulder the near total military responsibility for the region’s defense.”<sup>22</sup> While this arrangement persisted, the US was ‘present’, having made commitments to Saudi Arabia and Iran, but remained in the background, playing a “distant secondary role.”<sup>23</sup>

The reliance on Britain to shoulder the military burden in the Middle East and Persian Gulf is also connected to another important strand in American policy in the quarter-century after 1945: the doomed attempt to create an anti-Soviet regional defence system, as part of a world-wide containment policy.<sup>24</sup> In doing so the US failed to recognise the fundamental distrust that the populations of many regional states viewed such a move. Many saw Israel as a larger threat, and the presence of British forces in the region was resented as an imperialist intrusion.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, an agreement was struck in 1955, between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and the UK, and came to be known as the Baghdad Pact. Although the US was not a full member, it backed the deal and did take part as an observer.<sup>26</sup> Significantly, the only Arab state to join was Iraq, which was ruled by a pro-British monarchy. It was overthrown in 1958, causing Iraq to drop out, which essentially bankrupted the organisation. Egypt (which had been the focus of British military planning and presence in the Middle East) refused to participate, an obvious outcome in hindsight given that it was the epicentre of Arab nationalist movement under Nasser. While the Baghdad Pact (renamed the Central Treaty Organisation, CENTO, after the departure of Iraq) is widely regarded as a failure in military terms, Palmer argues that it was never intended to constitute a serious deterrent by American policymakers, who instead placed a

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Sedgewick, ‘Britain and the Middle East: In Pursuit of Eternal Interests,’ in Jack Covarrubias and Tom Lansford (eds.) *Strategic Interests in the Middle East: Opposition or Support for US Foreign Policy* (London: Ashgate, 2007), p.5-6

<sup>22</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.39

<sup>23</sup> Steve Yetiv, *Crude Awakenings: Global Oil Security and American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p.61

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, *The Superpowers and the Middle East*, p.30

<sup>25</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.63

<sup>26</sup> Marc O’Reilly, *Unexceptional: America’s Empire in the Persian Gulf, 1941-2007* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008), p.78

premium on its political and psychological aspects, the most important of which was to create an anti-Soviet front and demonstrate Western commitment to local elites.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately the move backfired for the reasons described above, contributing to the 1958 Iraqi revolution, which replaced a pro-western regime with a radical Arab nationalist one. Consequently, rather than blocking Soviet expansion, it “actually had the opposite effect of opening new areas of influence to the USSR.”<sup>28</sup>

Following the British withdrawal from its commitments ‘East of Suez’ between 1968 and 1971, Washington (to the irritation of senior policymakers) was forced to look elsewhere for proxies. In doing so it sought to both maintain a relatively ‘hands off’ approach and at the same time prevent the Soviets filling the vacuum left by the British withdrawal.<sup>29</sup> The US, mired in Vietnam, was quick to rule out building up its own forces in the region and so looked to its regional allies to take up the slack.<sup>30</sup> This development also coincided with the announcement of the ‘Nixon Doctrine’ in 1969, whereby the US would expect regional states to contain the spread of communism, supplying only arms and financial aid, rather than direct assistance. In other words, it would “apply strengths against weaknesses while leaving to allies forms of military activity uncongenial to the United States.”<sup>31</sup> The stage was set therefore for the adoption of the ‘Twin Pillars’ strategy, in which the US supported the aspirations of Iran and Saudi Arabia to supplant the UK and become the dominant powers in the Persian Gulf.<sup>32</sup> The relationship between the US and these states in this era is examined in more detail below.

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<sup>27</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.73-4

<sup>28</sup> Taylor, *The Superpowers and the Middle East*, p. 27

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 139-40

<sup>30</sup> F. Gregory Gause, ‘British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf 1968-73,’ *Review of International Studies*, 11 (4) 1985, p.259

<sup>31</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.304

<sup>32</sup> In contrast to the rulers of Oman, Qatar and what is now the United Arab Emirates, the rulers of Iran and Saudi Arabia were eager to see British forces depart. See Gause, ‘British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf 1968-1973,’ p.255-7 and Yergin, *The Prize*, p.565-6

The 'Twin Pillars' policy collapsed in 1979 with success of the Iranian revolution, and the coming to power of a viscerally anti-American regime. It also left the US with no candidate to take Iran's place. Despite its longstanding relationship with Saudi Arabia, that state was substantially smaller in terms of population and ability to mobilise military resources. Iraq was a possibility, but had a history of hostility towards traditional American allies and was a military client of the Soviet Union. The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan of the previous year made the formulation of a new American policy more pressing from Washington's perspective, as the American position in the region now appeared under threat from both the Soviets and regional sources. It was at this point that US policymakers became more amenable to a deeper, more prominent American role in the region.

### **3.3 The 'Twin Pillars' and bilateral relations with Gulf States**

In this section, we will examine the relationships between the US and the largest and most influential states in the Persian Gulf, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, from the end of the Second World War to the end of the Cold War. In doing so, both the reliance of the US on proxies, and the nature of its interests in the region will be demonstrated, as will the domination of the Cold War framework in American policymaking.

#### **3.3.1 US-Saudi relations**

American policymakers were quick to identify Saudi Arabia as an important ally even before the conclusion of the Second World War. As already stated above, President Roosevelt thought the post-war relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia important enough to warrant a personal meeting with King Ibn Saud on the Great Bitter Lake only weeks before the former's death. While Roosevelt ruled out the search for new oil concession by American firms during the war in order to prevent friction with the UK, he nonetheless extended the Lend-Lease program to include Saudi Arabia in 1943, subsidising the rule of the Saudi monarchy in order to ensure that American companies were not

disadvantaged in post-war Saudi Arabia.<sup>33</sup> Significantly, the wartime importance of Saudi Arabia to American national security did not end with victory over the Axis Powers in 1945, and “[v]arious American bureaucrats confirmed the importance of Saudi Arabia to US commercial expansion and security.” Consequently, the American airbase at Dhahran (designed to link the Anglo-American and Russian war efforts and the Atlantic and Pacific theatres together) was completed on the orders of President Truman despite the end of hostilities, giving the US power-projection capability in the region after 1945.<sup>34</sup>

In 1947, Truman also went so far as to pledge to take “energetic measures under the auspices of the United Nations to confront...aggression” against Saudi Arabia,<sup>35</sup> a move that predated the Eisenhower Doctrine by a decade, and came only a year after the standoff with the USSR over Soviet support for the separatist People’s Republic of Azerbaijan in northern Iran. Therefore, although it would be decades before the US would ramp up its involvement in the Persian Gulf, policymakers had already asserted the importance of Saudi Arabia to American national security by the end of the 1940s, and supplanted Britain as Saudi Arabia’s chief financial and military patron.<sup>36</sup> It was amongst those states offered military assistance by the US following the passage of legislation authorising the president to distribute foreign military aid, and agreement on the terms of this assistance between the two countries in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The US military has been active in training and liaising with the Saudi armed forces since that time.<sup>37</sup>

Despite this, the US military presence in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf as a whole remained small in the subsequent decade, and the US was not called upon by the Saudis to take any ‘energetic measures.’ Nonetheless, tensions were rising in the region, and the stability and security of the Saudi state

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<sup>33</sup> Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), p.324-5

<sup>34</sup> O’Reilly, *Unexceptional Empire*, p.46 and 48-9

<sup>35</sup> Steve Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States and the Persian Gulf, 1972-2005* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008), p.28

<sup>36</sup> Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia*, p.37

<sup>37</sup> United States Military Training Mission to Saudi Arabia website, <http://www.usmtm.sppn.af.mil/>, accessed 02-03-2010

and its alliance with the US were threatened by the upheaval that accompanied the rise of Arab nationalism and the fallout from the Suez crisis. Accordingly, the declaration of the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957 (in which the US pledged to defend any Middle East state from international communism if requested to do so) was welcomed by the Saudis, who also extended the lease on Dhahran airbase until 1962.<sup>38</sup> The outbreak of the civil war in Yemen, Egypt's involvement in it and an escalating war of words with Nasser would lead the Saudis to make an unprecedented request of the Americans: the despatch of American military forces to the kingdom.<sup>39</sup> The presence of Egyptian troops in a warzone on Saudi Arabia's borders, and the defection of some of its air force pilots, led the Saudis to request American fighter squadrons be stationed in Saudi Arabia. While, as argued in chapter 4, this is an example of the US being 'pulled' into regional politics, Washington's acquiescence demonstrates the importance attached to relations with Saudi Arabia.

The next major development in the US-Saudi relationship came in 1969, with the declaration of the Nixon Doctrine and the adoption of the 'Twin Pillars' policy. While Iran was obviously the most senior partner in the enterprise, given its larger population and the shah's eagerness to make Iran a regional power, the US included Saudi Arabia out of recognition of its central role, both in the region and in American policy, and to offset Saudi fears of Iranian domination of the Gulf.<sup>40</sup> Saudi defence expenditure in the wake of the dramatic oil price rises following the 1973 October War was enormous,<sup>41</sup> eventually rising to amongst the highest in the world.<sup>42</sup> Much of this money, of course, went to US firms, including the purchase of a fleet of modern fighter aircraft in the early 1970s, which in turn necessitated a major support contract with a US firm to enable the

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<sup>38</sup> Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (London: Saqi Books, 2002), p.58 and 67

<sup>39</sup> Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, p.372; Little, *American Orientalism*, p.238-9

<sup>40</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.88

<sup>41</sup> Total Saudi defence expenditure was almost \$83 billion between 1969-81 (in 1984 US\$), Anthony Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability: Saudi Arabia, the Military Balance in the Gulf, and Trends in the Arab-Israeli Military Balance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), p.160, fig. 5.4

<sup>42</sup> Saudi defence spending was the 9<sup>th</sup> highest in the world in 2008. Stockholm Institute for Peace Research 2009 Yearbook, Appendix 5A, <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2009/05/05A>, accessed 16-03-10

Saudi military to operate and maintain them. Despite this, it remained much less visible than Iran's concurrent military expansion, focusing more heavily on importing expertise, infrastructure projects and the training and modernisation of existing forces than on acquiring new hardware.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, of the 30,000 American expatriate workers in Saudi Arabia in 1976, more than a fifth were working on defence-related projects.<sup>44</sup> The expansion of military links between the US and Saudi Arabia was given added impetus by the collapse of the Iranian pillar, the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The early 1980s saw further arms purchase agreements between the US and Saudi Arabia, chiefly advanced F-15 'Eagle' fighter-interceptors (the most sophisticated in the US arsenal) and Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, for command and control purposes. The sale of this weaponry proved controversial in the US, and the delivery was delayed and subject to modification by pro-Israeli forces in Congress.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, these weapons arrived in time and in sufficient numbers to enter service with the Saudi military during the Iran-Iraq war, shooting down Iranian aircraft that strayed into Saudi airspace.<sup>46</sup> The fruits of the Saudi military build-up were apparent in the 1991 Gulf War, in which US and Coalition forces were able to use the extensive military infrastructure built up in the preceding decades (probably with precisely this kind of intervention in mind) to eject the Iraqi army from Kuwait.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.3.2 US-Iranian relations

By far the most chequered relationship maintained by the US with any of the Persian Gulf states was with Iran. In the course of the Cold War era it went from being America's primary surrogate to supplanting the Soviet Union as the *bête noire* of American Persian Gulf policy in the post-Cold War era. In this

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<sup>43</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.91-2; Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability*, p.159

<sup>44</sup> C. Paul Bradley, *Recent US Policy in the Persian Gulf* (Graham, NH: Thompson & Rutter, 1982), p.45-6

<sup>45</sup> Vassiliev, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, p.398-9

<sup>46</sup> Shireen Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.88

<sup>47</sup> Steve Yetiv, *America and the Persian Gulf: The Third-Party Dimension in World Politics* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), p.82; Yetiv, *Crude Awakenings*, p.79

regard it was both more visible and more intense than the American relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Like Saudi Arabia, American policymakers recognised the strategic importance of Iran at the dawn of the Cold War, and sought to keep it out of the Soviet orbit. As a result, Iran was one of the earliest arenas of Cold War confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union, although US attention was sporadic, “focused as it was on a bigger, more important picture.” Nonetheless, in 1946 the US judged Iran important enough, and Soviet activities in northern Iran provocative enough, to intervene to “prevent its friend, turned foe, from establishing a permanent foothold in this most valuable of locations.”<sup>48</sup> The US military’s Joint Chiefs of Staff subsequently recommended the US extend a small amount of military aid to Iran.<sup>49</sup> Iran was therefore among those states named in the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949, which authorised President Truman to “furnish military assistance as provided in this Act to Iran”.<sup>50</sup>

The Eisenhower administration deepened American involvement in Iran substantially, once again motivated by the perceived exigencies of Cold War rivalry. The most notorious example of this was ‘Operation Ajax’, the CIA-facilitated overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953, following his nationalisation of Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) operations in Iran.<sup>51</sup> Although Eisenhower undermined British attempts to overthrow Nasser three years later, the situation in Iran was sufficiently threatening that he thought it necessary to assist the UK in its attempts to prevent Mossadegh damaging western interests by bringing down his government. Although many US officials were unsympathetic to AIOC and the British position,<sup>52</sup> the risk that Mossadegh’s government would fall and be replaced by a communist regime that

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<sup>48</sup> Donette Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations since the Islamic Revolution* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p.1 and 2

<sup>49</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.37-8

<sup>50</sup> Title III, Section 301, Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949, *The American Journal of International Law*, 44 (1) Official Documents Supplement, 1950, p.31

<sup>51</sup> For a good account of the whole affair, see James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (Binghamton, NY: Yale University Press, 1988), p.72-97

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p72-75; Little, *American Orientalism*, p.56-7



would align Iran with the Soviet Union was judged to be too great, leading the president to authorise covert action to intervene.<sup>53</sup> The US subsequently sponsored the return of the shah to power. While the major US oil companies played a substantial role in the Iranian oil industry post-Mossadegh, they were pressured into doing so by their government, being leery of further unrest in Iran and already flush with Saudi oil. The US government, in response, argued that Iran needed oil revenues to prevent an economic collapse that would allow communists to seize power, and which would in turn jeopardise the oil companies' concessions in the rest of the Middle East.<sup>54</sup>

The Kennedy and Johnson administrations continued to sponsor the shah's rule, with Kennedy in particular pressuring the shah into making some political concessions and engaging in a socio-economic development program, the 'White Revolution.' However, it was the announcement of the British withdrawal from the Gulf in 1968 that presaged a dramatic shift in US-Iranian relations. The shah hoped to transform Iran into a regional superpower, and therefore sought US sponsorship, primarily in the form of arms transfers, to enable Iran to replace Britain as the primary military power in the Persian Gulf. This coincided with the declaration of the Nixon Doctrine. There was therefore a new convergence of interests between the shah and Washington that ensured Iran was the perfect candidate to assume the UK's security role in the region, given the US reluctance to do so and the fears of Soviet expansion into the vacuum left behind. Subsequently, the 1970s saw Iran become the cornerstone of the 'Twin Pillars' policy, and was seen by Washington as its foremost surrogate in the Persian Gulf.

The most obvious example of this close cooperation was the massive surge in arms sales from the US to Iran, financed by the sharp rise in oil prices after 1973 (despite the shah's willingness to ignore the OAPEC embargo of the

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<sup>53</sup> Little, *American Orientalism*, p.216-7; Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.67-70; Yetiv, *The Prize*, p.468

<sup>54</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, p.470-1

US, and also to supply Israel, he was a noted ‘price hawk’ within OPEC).<sup>55</sup> Bill goes so far as to state: “the transfer of arms from America to Iran took place at levels never before known in international political history.”<sup>56</sup> This followed a meeting in Iran the previous year between the shah and President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, in which it was agreed to allow Iran to purchase virtually any weapon system in the US arsenal,<sup>57</sup> excepting only the most sensitive technologies and nuclear weapons. This contrasted markedly with the policy of previous American postwar administrations, who had carefully limited arms sales to Iran.<sup>58</sup> US arms sales to Iran subsequently rose from \$513 million in 1972 to \$2.2 billion in 1973. In 1974 they almost doubled this figure, reaching \$4.3 billion. In total, Iran spent almost \$12 billion on importing US weaponry between 1971 and 1976, making it the biggest customer of American weaponry in the world.<sup>59</sup> The flow of sophisticated weapons was so large it far outstripped the ability of the Iranian military to operate it, so the shah’s government contracted training and maintenance programmes to a number of American firms. As a consequence, the number of Americans living and working in Iran in this period numbered in the tens of thousands, reaching 31,000 in 1976, of whom half were from the private sector.<sup>60</sup> US-Iranian trade was not limited to armaments: a 1975 economic agreement between the US and Iran saw the former agree to supply nuclear power plants and fuel, as well as engage in major infrastructure projects.<sup>61</sup> US policymakers were correct in their judgement that the shah’s goals were broadly compatible with American and western interests, justifying Iran’s role as the senior partner in the ‘Twin Pillars’ policy. The shah was hostile to radical, Ba’athist Iraq, and sent troops to assist Oman in crushing of the Marxist-inspired rebellion in the province of Dhofar, in what Bradley called “an exemplary application of the Nixon Doctrine to the Gulf region.”<sup>62</sup> He

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<sup>55</sup> Yergin, *The Prize*, p.625-6; Yetiv, *Crude Awakenings*, p.63; Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York, NY: Random House, 2004), p.99 and p.106-7

<sup>56</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, p.202

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.200

<sup>58</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p.96

<sup>59</sup> Bradley, *Recent US Policy in the Persian Gulf*, p.34-5

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.35

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.40

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.39

also allowed US intelligence agencies to set up facilities in Iran to monitor the Soviet Union.<sup>63</sup>

The fact that the US invested so heavily in the shah made it all the more catastrophic for American policymakers when the Iranian Revolution of 1979 led to the downfall of his regime and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The degree of support that the shah had enjoyed from the US demonstrated once more an important aspect of its Persian Gulf policy- ignorance or disregard of the local conditions in which American policy was carried out. While Kennedy had insisted that the shah embark on some reforms (which had ironically led to unrest from conservatively-minded elements of the Iranian population), his government had remained repressive and corrupt and backed up by a brutal internal security apparatus that tolerated little in the way of real dissent. The fact that the US had become so closely identified with the shah's rule was doubly unfortunate, as it ensured that the new clerical regime was hostile to the US and its interests and sought a total break with American policy. The downfall of the shah was therefore also the downfall of the 'Twin Pillars' strategy in the Gulf, with the largest and most populous state in the region transformed from a reliable American surrogate to a fierce opponent of its policies and presence.

### **3.3.3 US-Iraqi relations**

Following the Iraqi revolution of 1958, the US viewed Iraq with suspicion, in contrast to the era of the pro-Western monarchy that had previously dominated the country. With US policy centred on maintaining the status quo and excluding the Soviet Union from the region, the existence of a radical Arab nationalist, anti-western regime in control of such a critical state was a concern to American policymakers. Iraq was therefore seen in terms of its hostility to American allies like Saudi Arabia and the shah's Iran, and in its relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, p.254

<sup>64</sup> Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2004), p.107; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.158

Marr describes the events of 1958 as a “fundamental change in Iraq’s foreign policy orientation...The shift was to prove permanent, putting Iraq into the Soviet orbit for decades and distancing it from the West and its regional allies.” The Soviet Union subsequently became the principal supplier to Iraq’s military,<sup>65</sup> in contrast to the pre-revolutionary era in which Iraq had been a founding member of the anti-Soviet Baghdad Pact. The seizure of power by the Ba’th party in 1968 led to an intensification of the radical trends in Iraqi foreign policy, with Iraq offering support to Marxist South Yemen and left-wing groups in North Yemen and elsewhere in the Gulf states. This angered Iraq’s conservative neighbours in the Gulf, who were also disconcerted by border disputes between Iraq and Kuwait that had led to military standoffs.<sup>66</sup> These tensions, and the military build-up undertaken in neighbouring Iran, led the Iraqi regime to move closer to the Soviet Union, and the two states signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1972, followed by a visit to Iraq by Soviet premier Kosygin a few months later. This was preceded by the signing of an oilfield development deal and a visit by Soviet naval vessels to Iraq in 1969.<sup>67</sup> These developments marked the “zenith” of Soviet-Iraqi relations. However, Iraq’s new relationship with the USSR backfired when it enabled the shah to portray his border dispute with Iraq in terms of Western-Soviet rivalry, which helped to persuade President Nixon and his national security advisor Henry Kissinger to join the shah in backing Iraq’s rebellious Kurds, on the basis “that any enemy of the Baghdad regime was a potential ally of the United States.”<sup>68</sup>

Iranian aid to the Kurds was cut off in 1975, when Iran and Iraq agreed to re-draw their mutual border along the vital Shatt al-Arab waterway in Iran’s favour. This also led to a less fraught phase in Iraq’s relationship with its neighbours and the West. Flush with oil revenue, Iraq turned to western countries for imports of goods and services, as well as some weaponry, although

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<sup>65</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p.108

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p.147

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p.148

<sup>68</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p.201-3

over 60 percent of the latter was still sourced from the USSR in 1979.<sup>69</sup> However, compared to Saudi Arabia and Iran, with their massive American and Western arms purchases, thousands of American workers and military advisors, and key role in the American Persian Gulf security policy, Iraq remained a Soviet client state with a history of opposing American policy, hostility to its surrogates and rejection of the American-sponsored Arab-Israeli peace process. Moreover, by the time of the outbreak of the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the collapse of American 'Twin Pillars' policy, it had not had diplomatic relations with the US since 1967.<sup>70</sup>

The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 and the success of the Iranian revolution the previous year forced the US to reassess its Persian Gulf policy, including its relationship with Iraq. With the Soviet Union at war in neighbouring Afghanistan and Iran now essentially hostile, the US no longer had a militarily-strong surrogate to counterbalance Soviet power and deter Iranian threats to the Gulf monarchies. However, the outbreak of hostilities between Iran and Iraq presented the US with both a threat and an opportunity, as did the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. While victory for either Iran or the USSR and its Afghan clients appeared to threaten American interests in the region, they also offered the chance to put pressure on Iran and the Soviet Union by aiding their opponents, tying down both states in bloody wars and preventing them from making mischief elsewhere. The result was the US 'tilt' towards Iraq. Diplomatic relations were restored in 1984, Iraq was removed from the State Department's list of terrorist-sponsoring states, it was provided with important aid (including agricultural credits and crucial battlefield intelligence), and the US acquiesced in Iraq's armaments import programmes while taking steps to restrict Iran's.<sup>71</sup> Iraq, if not an outright surrogate, became at least an American 'asset', in the sense that cooperation between Iraq and the US fulfilled American policy goals, and its defence became a matter of American concern. The armaments the US delivered to Iran during the bizarre events of the Iran-Contra affair were not

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<sup>69</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p.168

<sup>70</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p.182

<sup>71</sup> Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, p. 51-3; Dilip Hiro, *Iran Today* (London: Politico's, 2005), p254

in the same order as the support given to Iraq, and did not represent a real change in American policy.<sup>72</sup> Instead, they were an opportunistic response to developments elsewhere, while the American support for Iraq was aimed at securing long-term interests in the security of the Gulf states, which an Iranian victory was judged to threaten. An unanticipated consequence of this support was the military power Saddam Hussein would be able to wield following the end of the war, unchecked by an exhausted Iran, which would allow him to invade Kuwait in 1990.<sup>73</sup>

### 3.4 Direct American intervention after 1979

Although American policymakers were not eager to intervene directly in the affairs of the Persian Gulf, the interests examined in the previous section ensured that the US military retained a small presence there and the US took a keen interest in political developments in the littoral states.<sup>74</sup> Although, as we also saw above, the US preferred to rely on regional states to contain Soviet expansion, when its ability to rely on regional states itself was in question, the US was willing to act more directly to restore the status quo if it judged its interests were sufficiently threatened. We saw above how the US relied on Britain's willingness to maintain its dominant security role in the region, then assisted Saudi Arabia and Iran in taking its place once the British withdrawal was completed in 1971. However, we also saw how the US intervened quickly to change the trajectory of Iranian politics once American policymakers feared that that state was in danger of 'going communist.'

The Iranian revolution and the consolidation of anti-American clerical rule, coupled with the attendant hostage crisis, also ensured that after 1979 American policymakers perceived Iran as a regional threat to US interests, in addition to the global challenge posed by the Soviet Union (fortunately for the

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<sup>72</sup> For a full account, see chapter 4 of James Blight, Janet Lang, Hussein Banai, Malcolm Byrne, John Tirman, *Becoming Enemies: US-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War, 1979-1988* (Plymouth: Rowan & Littlefield, 2012)

<sup>73</sup> Yetiv, *Crude Awakenings*, p.42; *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, p.77

<sup>74</sup> A small naval force of less than five ships, the 'Middle East Force' (MIDEASTFOR).

US, the two were not synonymous, given the new Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy orientation of 'neither East nor West'). The US had seen the collapse of its surrogates policy at a time when its interests seemed increasingly threatened. This therefore dictated that either the US find another proxy, assume a larger direct role in the regional security system (move from 'over the horizon' to 'into the backyard'), or a combination of both. Arguably, events dictated that it would be the latter that was adopted by the US: the sponsorship of the Iraqi war effort against Iran and the concurrent upgrading of the American presence and power-projection capabilities in the Persian Gulf region.

The most public expression of this new trend in American policy was the announcement, in the 1980 State of the Union Address, of what came to be known as the 'Carter Doctrine', in which President Jimmy Carter unambiguously stated: "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."<sup>75</sup> To back up this claim, the US took several measures to 'beef up' both its military presence in the region and the ability to project military force into the Persian Gulf from elsewhere throughout the 1980s. The most obvious example was the creation of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF), an inter-service military force that could be deployed into the Persian Gulf without diverting American troops from other theatres.<sup>76</sup> While this had been mooted since 1977 thanks to increased Soviet activity in the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean, it languished in the planning process for various reasons until the events of 1979 made it a high priority.<sup>77</sup> This process was continued under the Reagan administration, which further reorganized the US military's Persian Gulf presence, placing the RDJTF under the newly-formed Central Command (USCENTCOM), whose area of responsibility was centered on the

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<sup>75</sup> A transcript and video of the 1980 State of the Union Address is available on the website of the University of Virginia's Miller Centre Public Affairs, <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3404>, accessed 11-03-2010.

<sup>76</sup> For a description of the RDJTF and its mission, as envisaged at the time, see Paul K. Davis, *Observations on the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force: Origins, Direction and Mission*, RAND Corporation paper no. P-6751, June 1982, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P6751/P6751.pdf>, accessed 11-03-2010.

<sup>77</sup> Bradley. *Recent US Policy in the Persian Gulf*, p.98-9

Persian Gulf, and which formally made the Middle East a discrete theatre of operations. The US also took steps to preposition equipment and supplies in the region, upgraded its base facilities on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, and reinforced its modest permanent naval presence in Persian Gulf waters. Additionally, access agreements were negotiated with some regional states, including Oman.<sup>78</sup> There was also a marked ‘mission creep’ in the transition from the Carter to the Reagan eras, illustrated by President Regan’s comment that there was “no way” that the US would allow Saudi Arabia’s oil production to be shut down. This is sometimes referred to as the Reagan Doctrine (or sometimes the Reagan Corollary), and is taken by many scholars to mark the public expansion of the Carter Doctrine to regional threats like Iran.<sup>79</sup>

American fears were demonstrated dramatically by the US involvement in the ‘Tanker War’ phase of the Iran-Iraq War. As discussed in the following chapter, Iraq, under pressure from Iran on the battlefield, sought to ‘internationalise’ the conflict by goading its opponent into threatening the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz. Iran responded by attacking the merchant fleets of Saudi Arabia and Kuwaiti, who had been financing the Iraqi war effort, in 1984. This led US officials to warn that the US, in Palmer’s words, while not as yet interested in intervening in the conflict, “was not prepared to see the gulf’s oil traffic threatened.”<sup>80</sup> The situation deteriorated over the next three years, leading Kuwait to request US and Soviet naval assistance in 1987. The US responded, determined both to exclude Soviet forces from the region and to secure the uninterrupted export of oil, dispatching substantial naval forces to the area to escort reflagged oil tankers. This led to clashes with Iranian forces when US Navy escorts and US-flagged tankers were hit by Iranian mines and missiles, which in turn led the US to conduct reprisal strikes against Iranian naval targets, doing severe damage to the Iranian navy, and contributing to Iran’s decision to accept a ceasefire in 1988.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Bradley, *Recent US Policy in the Persian Gulf*, p.100-2

<sup>79</sup> Yetiv, *Crude Awakenings*, p.66; Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.118

<sup>80</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p.119

<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 7 of Palmer’s *Guardians of the Gulf* for a detailed account.



The willingness on the part of the US to involve itself in the region more overtly and on a larger scale was therefore dictated by its traditional interests, but made necessary by the absence of a reliable proxy and the vulnerability of its traditional allies. This pattern was repeated in the Gulf crisis of 1990-1, when the US deployed its military in massive force to expel Iraq from Kuwait. In this case, the effective end of the Cold War was an important factor that facilitated this policy, though it obviously cannot be used to explain it. Instead, Washington feared that Saddam Hussein would use the prestige and economic leverage gained by a successful annexation of Kuwait to dominate the Persian Gulf's oil supplies, something it was not prepared to countenance.<sup>82</sup> The USSR's unwillingness and/or inability to seriously challenge US intervention undoubtedly contributed to the decision by US policymakers to do so, at least indirectly. The case of the 'Tanker War' is less dramatic in this regard, but still illuminating, as the USSR opposed the reflagging of the tankers by the US, at least in public. However, the USSR was unwilling to take serious measures to prevent it,<sup>83</sup> and the fear of the consequences of an Iranian victory, coupled with Iranian hostility, ensured that the Soviet Union was willing to make massive arms sales to Iraq from 1982, which was in any case already a military client.<sup>84</sup> The shrinking chance of superpower confrontation therefore also played a role in enabling more overt forms of American intervention in the Persian Gulf, though it by no means formed the impetus of this trend. Ironically, although the Carter Doctrine and the build-up of US forces in the Persian Gulf "were triggered by concerns about potential Soviet actions, they eventually derived their importance through enabling later responses to threats from within the region."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, p.82; Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies*, p.220-1; Author's interview with Ambassador Chas Freeman, former US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Washington DC, February 2012

<sup>83</sup> Hunter, *Iran and the World*, p.71

<sup>84</sup> Kazem Sajjadpour, 'Neutral Statements, Committed Practice: The USSR and the War', in Farhang Rajaee (ed.), *Iranian Perspectives on the Iran-Iraq War* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997), p.33-4; Hiro, *Iran Today*, p.220

<sup>85</sup> Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies*, p.104

### 3.5 Conclusions

In this chapter we have seen how the centrality of oil to the economy of the developed world, together with the Cold War, ensured that the Persian Gulf's oil reserves occupied an equally central role in the security calculations of US policymakers in a manner that transcended purely economic considerations. This comprises a vital 'push' that ensured that the US would concern itself with the affairs of the region, over and above any other factor, pre- and post-dating the Cold War itself and in parallel with the US commitment to the existence of Israel.

The means by which American policymakers sought to secure this vital asset, were, on the other hand, less consistent, even though the Cold War framework proved to be an enduring prism through which US policymakers viewed developments in the Persian Gulf. Aside from the tensions inherent between the US support for Israel and its desire to exclude the Soviet Union from the Middle East and Persian Gulf, US policy also appears in hindsight to be reactive and somewhat ad hoc. Despite the importance attached to the region by American policymakers, for most of the Cold War the US preferred to 'contract out' regional security to its partners, firstly Britain and then Iran, all the while maintaining a close relationship with Saudi Arabia. In doing so the US ceded the initiative. This was held by its partners, and when they withdrew or became hostile American policy was forced to change direction. When the Iran-Iraq War broke out, the US offered assistance to both sides for different reasons, but tilted heavily towards Iraq. The US was forced to react once again by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, in that instance with massive force, deploying a substantial fraction of its own military now that Iraq's military machine threatened to dominate the littoral Arab states and no effective surrogates were available to counter it.

Where the US was more consistent was in defence of its fundamental interests. This can be seen in its willingness to intervene in Iran in the early 1950s and again in the Gulf as a whole in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the former case, it was fear of the rise of a communist regime in Iran that motivated the US to assist the overthrow of Mossadegh and the return of the shah- allowing

one of the largest, most strategically placed and the most populous state to fall into the Soviet orbit was plainly unacceptable. Later, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran motivated American policymakers to actually consider extending the reach of American military force into the region, which the US actually judged necessary in the so-called 'Tanker War', and (on a much larger scale) the Gulf War of 1991, when American policymakers feared for the security of the West's oil supplies. In these cases however there were no effective surrogates, and thus the US was forced to intervene directly. Once the Soviet threat had diminished, this gave the US much more room to use the capacities it had built-up in the region without raising global tensions, ironically to meet regional threats to its interests.

Overall, then, we can see that US foreign policy in the Persian Gulf has been largely concerned with the global implications of events in the region, to the virtual exclusion of local developments. Ironically, local forces did have a role in shaping American policy, forces which had little to do with the Cold War and more to do with regional and national issues, as we shall see in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4 The balance of power in the Persian Gulf, 1945-1991**

While the previous chapter examined the global context of American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf, this chapter examines the power-politics of the Persian Gulf that are directly relevant to American foreign policymaking during the time period in question (1991-2001). Its purpose within the thesis as a whole is to describe and explain the distinct regional factors which contributed to the adoption by the US of a policy of 'dual containment', as opposed to factors stemming from global and/or American politics. In so doing, it will describe and explain the dominant regional security trends among the Persian Gulf's littoral states, through the examination of both the geopolitical factors and the role of history and ideology, and explain how this ensures that the system is an essentially anarchic one that is prone to mutual suspicion and realist balance of power politics. Following on from this point, it will also argue that there were endogenous factors in the regional sub-system (i.e. 'pull' factors) that enabled and to some degree encouraged US intervention in the Persian Gulf once the system ceased to function.

The era (from the end of the Second World War to the end of the Cold War and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait) is examined because it marks the withdrawal of outright colonial, imperial presence from the Persian Gulf's major states, and the formal assumption of their own sovereignty and control over their foreign policies. It was also the era in which the idiosyncratic dynamics that characterise the Persian Gulf's security system emerged: a scalene tripolar system, comprising three poles: Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia (and the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council). It is therefore the era that requires examination if we wish to understand the interactions of the regional states and how they relate to American Persian Gulf policy, rather than the extra-regional factors that facilitated this. Without an understanding of the modern history of the region, and the most important underlying trends in its politics, it is impossible to

understand why the US found itself supporting Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf monarchies, and opposing Iran and Iraq.

The chapter is divided into the following sections: (i) geopolitical structure; (ii) the nature of the sub-system of the states of the Persian Gulf; (iii) the nature of the states themselves; (iv) the relevant diplomatic history of the Persian Gulf in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and (v) consequences of these factors.

#### **4.1 The Persian Gulf: geopolitical structure**

As mentioned, the littoral states of the Persian Gulf can be viewed as a ‘scalene’ tripolar balance of power system with three major poles: Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup> These three states are to all intents and purposes the ‘major players’ in the sub-region, being the largest, most populous and (at least potentially) the wealthiest. They therefore in theory possess the most latent politico-military power, and speaking broadly can assert their will in the politics of the region most effectively. This is of course a somewhat crude simplification of a complex and multifaceted situation, but the fact remains that these are undeniably the largest and most influential states in the area. This is true both for the era that is the focus of this study (1991 - 2001), and the era that is the focus of this chapter. Consequently, the figures quoted are drawn primarily from the former.

Iran, as many observers concede, possesses the potential to become the regional hegemon.<sup>2</sup> Its coastline dominates the northern shore of the Persian

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘tripolar’ is used here rather than ‘triangular’ because it better captures the balance of power aspect, but the meaning is largely the same. The term ‘triangular’ is used by Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Henner Fürtig, ‘Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The Interregional Order and US Policy,’ *Middle East Journal*, 61 (4) 2007, pp.627-640; Matteo Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Persian Gulf: Diplomacy, Security and Economic Coordination in a Changing Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2011). The term ‘scalene’ is taken from Legrenzi.

<sup>2</sup>For instance, John Mearsheimer & Stephen Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p.281; Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.75

Gulf (hence the waterway's name)<sup>3</sup> with a territory of 1,648,195 km sq, making it the 18<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world.<sup>4</sup> In terms of population, its ranking is similar (16), and was estimated by the United Nations to be almost 67 million in 1999.<sup>5</sup> Saudi Arabia lies at the other end of the relative scale in population, with a total of almost 21 million, i.e. less than a third of that of Iran, ranking 48<sup>th</sup> in the world.<sup>6</sup> However, by size it is comparable: 2,149,690 km sq.<sup>7</sup> Iraq falls between the two in terms of its population, though it is much closer to Saudi Arabia, with a population of approximately 22.5 million in 1999.<sup>8</sup> Iran's population outnumbers both that of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states combined. This relationship has remained roughly stable, with some exceptions, since 1950, and Saudi Arabia has always had the smallest population of the larger Gulf states.<sup>9</sup> On paper, at least, Iran therefore has the potential to be more militarily formidable than the other regional states, by dint of its demographic superiority and its commanding strategic position as fully half of the Persian Gulf's coastline, while Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia individually exceed the other Gulf states on these measures. Iran also possesses somewhat more 'strategic depth' than Iraq, as most of its major urban centres are located in the interior of the country.<sup>10</sup> In comparison the next largest state, Oman, is 70<sup>th</sup> in the world in terms of size, and 136<sup>th</sup> in population. Yemen is comparable to Saudi Arabia in population, but is poor and plagued by political instability. Geographically, it is also located on the other side of the Arabian Peninsula from the Straits of Hormuz, and is therefore more remote from the Persian Gulf.

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<sup>3</sup> While this term is contested by some Arab states, the name 'Persian Gulf' has been consistently upheld by the International Hydrographic Organisation and the various arms of the United Nations Organisation. For instance, see United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, Working Paper No.61: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/gegn23wp61.pdf> accessed 31-12-2009

<sup>4</sup> CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>, accessed 10-11-2009

<sup>5</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Population Division, *The World at Six Billion*, <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/sixbillion/sixbilpart2.pdf>, accessed 10-11-2009

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> CIA World Factbook

<sup>8</sup> UN DESA, *The World at Six Billion*

<sup>9</sup> UN DESA, *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>, accessed 31-12-2009

<sup>10</sup> Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*, p.75

These are crude measures, and fail to take into account other significant factors which may help or hinder these states in any attempt to translate their human and geographical resources into military power. Arguably the most substantial amongst these are economic factors. The Persian Gulf is the site of a majority of the world's proven oil reserves, and the export of this resource is a tremendous source of revenue for the Gulf states. As of 2008, Saudi Arabia led the world in proven reserves of oil, with 264.06 billion barrels, followed (in the Middle East) by Iran with 137.05 billion, and finally trailed by Iraq with 115 billion.<sup>11</sup> The latter alone amounts to more than 11 per cent of the world's proven reserves.<sup>12</sup> Although there is a great disparity in relative terms, in absolute terms these statistics represent enormously lucrative revenue streams.

Given their size, population and mineral endowments, these three states therefore figure most prominently in the security calculations both of each other and other regional states, and dominate the security dynamics of the region. Irrespective of the policies and stances of their governments at any one time in their modern history, they possess the *potential* to threaten each other, should they choose to try to translate their resources and population into military force and use it coercively. Bearing the power disparities between these three states, it is no surprise to see the recurrence of certain patterns of interaction between them. For one, the fear of regional domination/hegemony by Iran on the part of the other two, and their combination against it by various means. Secondly, the attempt to play off one state against another by the third, which is the weakest and/or most threatened. Finally, the weakest/most threatened state enlisting extra-regional allies to protect it against the other two. The latter is most marked in the case of Saudi Arabia, which for various reasons lacks the latent military potential of the other two states: "According to the main factors...that determine the regional balance of power, the centre of the political and strategic system of the Persian Gulf does not consist of three, but, at best, of two and three-quarter

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<sup>11</sup> Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), *Annual Statistical Bulletin 2008*, [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/static\\_files\\_project/media/downloads/publications/ASB2008.pdf](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/ASB2008.pdf) accessed 19-03-2009

<sup>12</sup> Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Boulder, CO; Westview Press, 2004, p.295

states. Even the involvement of Saudi Arabia in the new security measures of the Arabian Peninsula, in the form of the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] could not remove this disparity completely.”<sup>13</sup> The relative weakness of Saudi Arabia, in comparison to its neighbours, is therefore one of the most important defining characteristics of the system itself, and the origin of one of its defining features – its lop-sidedness, hence its description as ‘scalene.’

The interactions between the three major Persian Gulf states are therefore three-sided, in that they tend to be dominated by the interactions between Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran, which leads Fürtig to characterise them as “triangular”. He argues that this system of relations has held since the Second World War, and that “If one of the mentioned countries gains too much weight, the other two try to compensate.” Consequently, in general, “whether conflict or cooperation prevailed between certain countries was due to the actual state of the overall balance of the triangular system.”<sup>14</sup> This does not, of course, guarantee the occurrence of conflict and rivalry between these states, but these factors were necessary, if not sufficient, conditions, for the presence of these phenomena in the relations between Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. These other conditions are examined in the following pages.

## **4.2 The nature of the regional sub-system**

The Persian Gulf possesses a peculiar set of political dynamics, which are derived in part from the nature of the regional sub-system of states, and which both affects and is affected by them. The most visible of these factors is the potential for irredentism, which is ‘built in’ to the system, and is relatively high in the case of the states of the Middle East and Persian Gulf.<sup>15</sup> This stems in part from the legacy of colonialism and the domination of the region by outside

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<sup>13</sup> Henner Fürtig, *Iran’s Rivalry with Saudi Arabia Between the Gulf Wars* (Reading, Ithaca Press, 2002), p.150

<sup>14</sup> Fürtig, ‘Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The Interregional Order and US Policy,’ p.627

<sup>15</sup> See Chapters 3 and 4 of Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2003)



powers, and from the nature of the regional states themselves. The former is dealt with first.

While Saudi Arabia was never colonised or occupied by external actors in the post-Ottoman era and Iran has a long history as a formally independent state, the other states of the Persian Gulf are to some degree products of the era of European imperial control, at least in terms of their systems of government and borders. Following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the First World War, Britain in particular adopted a more explicit security role, especially in regards to Iraq, stationing military forces in the country and taking a major role in the formation and running of its state institutions and the installation of a friendly Hashemite monarch. This took place first under the terms of a League of Nations Mandate, and then the re-occupation of the country during World War II, with Iraq enjoying only a brief interlude of formal independence in the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> Britain played a similar role in many of the other Gulf monarchies, such as Kuwait, with the major exception of Saudi Arabia. The installation of client regimes by European empires, and the following quasi-independence of their states, was a marked trend within the Middle East in the immediate postwar era.<sup>17</sup> This followed a lengthy period of British domination of regional security issues in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a consequence of earlier rivalry with other colonial, imperial powers and as a consequence of British strategic interests in regards to lines of communication with its extensive colonial possessions in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>18</sup>

The nationalist backlash that this engendered within some of these states as their citizens became progressively more politically mobilised led to the rise of radical, revisionist forces to power, or their effective co-option and/or destruction by the nascent state's pre-existing rulers. This tended to send states

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Chapel Hill, NC; University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p.199

<sup>17</sup> Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, London: Saqi Books, 2002, p.19

<sup>18</sup> See J. E. Peterson, 'Britain and the Gulf: At the Periphery of Empire,' in Lawrence Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in History* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

down either revisionist or status quo paths in regards to their foreign policy,<sup>19</sup> depending on which side took control of the state in question. Perhaps the best example is the Iraqi revolution of 1958, which overthrew the British-installed Hashemite monarchy and set Iraq on a 'revisionist' course in regards to regional politics, in an attempt to match its foreign policy and borders to its own political identity.

At this point it is necessary to define the terms 'revisionist' and 'status quo' as they are used in this chapter. These terms refer to the foreign policy orientation of the leadership of a state, specifically in its attitudes to the legitimacy of the regional system and the regimes of its neighbours. A state is 'revisionist' if its leadership holds that: a) the currently-existing borders and character of interstate relations within the region are fundamentally illegitimate and in need of revision to bring them into accord with a more authentic political identity, and b) in practice disapproves of cooperation with, and intervention by, the West. A good example, once more, is the post-1958 revolutionary regime in Iraq, which had a strong Arab nationalist, anti-imperialist character. It asserted that the pre-existing borders of Iraq were illegitimate and should encompass both Kuwait and the ethnically Arab area of Iran.<sup>20</sup> It also voiced disapproval of the Arab monarchies in the Persian Gulf, on the grounds that they were reactionary, corrupt and pro-Western. In contrast, a 'status quo' state adopts a foreign policy orientation that aims at the opposite of a) and b). Saudi Arabia has consistently been in favour of the status quo. It has sought to minimise the impact of revisionist forces in the region, and frowned upon developments, such as the Iraqi and Iranian revolutions, that have threatened the equilibrium of pre-existing states and governments.

Secondly, the role of external forces in the construction of the regional sub-system also contributed to the fact that the new states have been relatively porous, in that they are more amenable to the appeal of transnational phenomena

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<sup>19</sup> This typology is also accepted by Matteo Legrenzi, building upon the work of NCR scholars like Randall Schweller. See Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.48

<sup>20</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p.158-9

that can 'cut out the middleman' and appeal to the people as a more authentic ideology or way of life. The two dominant strands of this phenomenon in the Middle East have been Arab nationalism and Pan-Islamism, rooted in the common religious, linguistic and ethnic heritage of the Arab states. This has threatened the legitimacy of both ruling elites and states themselves, and has contributed to the security dilemma they have faced, forcing them to consider what the impact of both their own and the policies of neighbouring states will be in this regard. David calls this phenomena, in which elites must consider threats to their rule from different sources, domestic and foreign, 'omnibalancing.'<sup>21</sup> The more-or-less arbitrary drawing of some state boundaries, as well as the more 'natural' borders evolved over the course of time, has exacerbated this in some cases, with religious and ethnic minorities present (and in some cases, ruling) in states with a majority of a different character. In other words, "[b]ecause religious, ethnic and national boundaries in the Gulf are not synonymous with state boundaries, geopolitical competition is easily transferred into domestic politics."<sup>22</sup> Sariolghalam, for one, concedes that the 'weakness' of the Arab states has had a profound impact on Persian Gulf relations, particularly those between Iran and the Arab states. The fact that the authenticity of ruling elites is, if not contested, then questionable, is inherently limiting to their policy-making autonomy. In his view, the Middle East, and therefore the Persian Gulf, is highly 'internationalised' and the state structures of the Arab states is endemically weak.<sup>23</sup>

A good example is the challenge posed to the Saudi monarchy by the wave of Arab nationalism embodied by Nasser in the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s. Saudi Arabia at that time had not developed the institutions of a modern state, and still relied on patrimonial forms of rule. The threat posed by this phenomenon was therefore particularly acute, as Nasser's pan-Arab message

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<sup>21</sup> This concept is introduced in Steven David, 'Explaining Third World Alignment', *World Politics* 43 (2) 1991, pp.233-256

<sup>22</sup> Richard Herrmann & R. William Ayres, 'The New Geo-Politics of the Gulf: Forces for Change and Stability,' in Gary Sick & Lawrence Potter (eds.) *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security and Religion* (New York, NY: St. Martin's, 1997), p.49

<sup>23</sup> Mahmood Sariolghalam, 'Arab-Iranian Rapprochement: the Regional and International Impediments', in Khair el-Din Haseeb (ed.), *Arab-Iranian Relations* (Beirut; Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1998)

resonated amongst the Saudi populace through shared ethnicity and language, while the Saudi state could at first muster only a weak response. By the late 1950s, relations between the Saudi regime and Nasser had deteriorated, and “King Saud...saw the main threat to his throne as emanating from the UAR [United Arab Republic]. Nasser’s reforms were having a strong impact on the nascent public opinion in Saudi Arabia and his popularity was growing among the Saudis.”<sup>24</sup>

### **4.3 The post-war littoral states**

This section examines the three dominant littoral Gulf states, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, from the perspective of their idiosyncratic features as states, as distinct from their physical endowments and features, and the geopolitical consequences arising from these. It examines the posture of each state towards the regional system and its neighbours, as determined by the specific characteristics of its statehood. These features derive in part from the varying levels of state formation and consolidation that were present in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq at the start of the 1990s. This, in turn, goes some way towards shaping the attitudes of the rulers and populace towards developments in international politics. Overall, then, it seeks to explain their individual trajectories through regional politics in light of their formative experiences, and the result this has had on the Persian Gulf sub-system.

#### **4.3.1 Saudi Arabia**

In some ways, Saudi Arabia has enjoyed the most continuity of the three in terms of its internal politics, and its approach to regional issues. In most respects, Saudi Arabia has consistently adopted a pro-status quo posture in its foreign policymaking. This stems in part from the fact that since the country’s founding it has remained an absolute monarchy with an economy centred around the lucrative export of oil. The foreign policy goals of its rulers are minimalist: to preserve the state’s current character and prevent changes that would lead to

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<sup>24</sup> Alexei Vassiliev, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), p.353

the downfall of its current political system.<sup>25</sup> As it lacks the potential to mount a serious military challenge to the existence of its rivals, Iran and Iraq, it also therefore has a stake in ensuring that the regional system remains stable, and that regional tensions do not result in the outbreak of tensions that could lead to outright confrontation.

The fact that its political system has been an absolute monarchy since its inception as a state has resulted in a longstanding aversion to the existence of a large and efficient military, as this could become an alternate centre of power that could threaten royal rule. As Legrenzi notes, “All the GCC states felt that military efficiency had to be sacrificed for the sake of regime security.”<sup>26</sup> This is echoed by Anthony Cordesman, who states, “The Gulf states face the difficulty that their goal is not simply one of creating a viable defense or deterrent, but doing so in a way that does not in the process destroy their political system.”<sup>27</sup> This fear is to some degree justified. Conspiracies within the Saudi military’s officer corps were reportedly uncovered and destroyed in the late 1960s, for example.<sup>28</sup> These fears are reflected in the structure of the armed forces. The majority of Saudi Arabia’s military personnel serve in two separate land-based branches, the regular army, known as the Royal Saudi Land Forces, and the Saudi National Guard. The latter exists ostensibly to maintain internal security as opposed to defending the state from external foes, but also acts as a counterbalance to the regular army, and vice-versa.<sup>29</sup> This has deepened the Saudi Arabian bias towards the status quo, given its mistrust of military force. This explains Fürtig’s claim that Saudi Arabia represents “three quarters” of a

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<sup>25</sup> Gregory Gause, ‘The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia,’ in Anoush Ehtashami & Raymond Hinnebusch (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p.193

<sup>26</sup> Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.48

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability: Saudi Arabia, the Military Balance in the Gulf, and Trends in the Arab-Israeli Military Balance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), p.69-70

<sup>28</sup> Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, p.68; Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America’s Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (Oxford, OUP, 2005), p.109

<sup>29</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/sa.htm>, accessed 11-11-2009, Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.66

state in balance of power terms.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, as we saw in the previous chapter, Saudi Arabia has made enormous investments in its defence forces and military infrastructure since the end of the 1960s, particularly its air force, that demonstrate its monarchy's fears of their neighbours and for regional stability, and arguably as a form of 'insurance' to obtain Western security assistance.<sup>31</sup>

This status-quo bias is deepened by Saudi Arabia's unique position in the Islamic world, as it encompasses the geographical area that saw the birth of the Muslim faith. Mecca and Medina, the two holiest sites to the world's Muslims, are located in Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi royal family bases its legitimacy to a great degree on the support of the country's religious establishment.<sup>32</sup> Famously, the official ideology of the Saudi state, popularly known as 'Wahhabism', relies on a radical and puritanical interpretation of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, and has done since the Al-Saud dynasty's patronage of the founder of the movement, Muhammad ibn Adb-al-Wahhab, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This leaves it vulnerable to claims from religiously-inspired extremists both inside and outside the Kingdom (the former including the late Osama Bin Laden) that the rule of the royal family is spiritually debased, and to others (such as the late Ayatollah Khomeini) that the institution of monarchy is un-Islamic, and that because of this and the fact that the Saudi monarchy is deeply corrupt means that it is not a legitimate custodian of the holy places.<sup>33</sup> Allegations that the regime is corrupt and not sufficiently pious are therefore highly damaging, and are a persistent and recurring threat: "At a number of times in history, which includes the contemporary period, *salafis* [religious radicals] have challenged the House of Saud, deeming the royal family to have failed to establish or practice the puritanical norms which they believe to be warranted."<sup>34</sup> The most dramatic example would be the seizure and subsequent siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November 1979.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Fürtig, *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia*, p.150

<sup>31</sup> Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.76

<sup>32</sup> Niblock, *Saudi Arabia*, p.29 and 31

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.69 and 80

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.5

<sup>35</sup> For a full account, see Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The Forgotten Uprising* (London: Allen Lane, 2007)

The composition and consolidation of the state of Saudi Arabia by its rulers has had a moderating influence on its foreign policy, especially in regards to regional politics. As the creation and consolidation of the state was largely the work of an indigenous elite, the state of Saudi Arabia as it currently exists does not suffer from a legitimacy deficit resulting from the installation of an external power's clients as its rulers. This is also true of Saudi Arabia's borders and the composition of its citizenry, which largely correspond with its dominant political identity, which Hinnebusch for one argues biases a state towards a pro-status quo direction, as there is little latent demand to reconfigure these amongst the mass of the population.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, a minority of the citizenry, perhaps 5–10%, are Shia, clustered in the Eastern province, traditionally known as al-Hasa. This element of the Saudi population is regarded with some suspicion by the authorities, and is largely excluded from employment in the upper echelons of the military, civil service and other branches of government. This is, in all likelihood, motivated by two fears: firstly, that the Saudi Shia represent a potential 'fifth column' for Iran or a future Shia-dominated Iraq, and secondly (and probably most importantly), the inability to openly acknowledge the equality of Shia citizens, given the views of this sect held by the Saudi religious establishment and the necessity of keeping them on-side.<sup>37</sup> The Saudi Shia will therefore remain second-class citizens, and therefore a potential source of conflict and instability. The fact that the Eastern province is the site of a substantial fraction of the kingdom's oil reserves makes this more troubling for the Saudi authorities.<sup>38</sup>

Overall, Saudi Arabia outwardly appears to have been a stable, constant, moderate force in the flux that is the politics of the Persian Gulf. Considered more broadly, however, we can see that it is strongly incentivised to exert itself to maintain a constant equilibrium in regional affairs, tacking one way and then another like a sailing ship in order to maintain a favourable course.

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<sup>36</sup> Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* p.74

<sup>37</sup> Niblock, *Saudi Arabia*, p.29

<sup>38</sup> See Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), and Graham Fuller & Rend Francke, *The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1999)

#### 4.3.2 Iran

As stated above, Iran represents a potential regional hegemon in light of its population, size, mineral endowments and location. This goes some way towards conditioning its leaders' view of its role in the regional sub-system of the Persian Gulf, and fears amongst the other states of its predominance. There is something approaching a consensus amongst observers that Iran has, in some ways, acted consistently since the end of the Second World War and the withdrawal of colonial powers. Specifically, Iran has sought a position as the leading state in the Persian Gulf, either as the 'regional policeman' under the Shah, or as a *primus inter pares* in the era of the Islamic Republic. This stems from a multitude of factors, including a 'primal' nationalism derived from Iranian self-perception as the largest state in the region,<sup>39</sup> and the understanding that the Persian Gulf represents Iran's economic lifeline to the outside world, being reliant on the seaborne export of its oil.<sup>40</sup> Ehteshami argues that the former has been a perennial feature of Iranian foreign policy, and to some extent, its leaders' worldview: "Derived from Iran's long history and its geography, Iran sees itself as uniquely qualified to determine, at the very least, the destiny of the Gulf subregion."<sup>41</sup> As Hashin wrote in the mid-1990s: "Iran's current policy in the Persian Gulf is dictated by nationalism, and economic and politico-strategic interests. These are the three constants in Tehran's Persian Gulf policy, and in this respect, the policy of the Islamic Republic is similar to that of Mohammed Reza Shah."<sup>42</sup> Overall, Dilip Hiro offers a blunt but not fundamentally inaccurate assessment that holds true for both eras:

Iran under the ayatollahs wanted to be the regional superpower, a position it thought it deserved: it was the most strategic country in the area, its shoreline covered not only the Persian Gulf but also the Arabian Sea, its population was one-

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<sup>39</sup> Christin Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami* (London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p.3-4

<sup>40</sup> Shahram Chubhin, *Iran's National Security Policy: Capabilities, Intentions and Impact* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), p.10

<sup>41</sup> Anoush Ehteshami, 'The Foreign Policy of Iran', Anoush Ehtashami & Raymond Hinnebusch (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p.286

<sup>42</sup> Hashin, *Crisis of the Iranian State*, p.43



and-a-half-times the total of the remaining seven Gulf states, and it shared the same religion – Islam - with its neighbors.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, categorising Iran as either a pro-status quo or revisionist state in either the pre- or post-revolutionary eras is problematic. While these are, of course, relative terms, they hold more true for some states than others. As discussed above, Saudi Arabia can be described as pro-status quo thanks to the essential consistency of its posture and its relatively weak position in balance of power terms, which does much to define the limits of its role in the Persian Gulf's security system. In contrast, Iran could be construed as either pro-status quo or revisionist depending on the makeup and beliefs of its government. As a potential hegemon, an attempt by Tehran to make this a reality could be perceived as pro-status quo if its interests coincided with the leadership of the other Gulf states, or revisionist if it threatened them. At the same time, any attempt by Iran to assert its predominance, irrespective of the character of its government and ideology, would also probably be viewed as unwelcome by the other Gulf states, who fear for their independence and the security of their interests in the face of Iranian hegemony.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, it is possible to argue that "Iran under the shah was, in essence, a status-quo power and served as an element of stability in the Persian Gulf."<sup>45</sup> There exists, therefore, scope for both geopolitical and ideological rivalry between Iran and its Arab neighbours.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, this geopolitical rivalry is exacerbated by the differing religious identities of both states and Saudi Arabia's unique role as the birthplace of Islam. Following the Iranian revolution of 1979, and the transformation of Iran into an Islamic Republic, revisionism became a much stronger aspect of Iran's foreign policy outlook. The new clerical leadership, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, branded monarchical political systems 'un-Islamic', attacked the Saudi custodianship of Mecca and Medina, and announced its

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<sup>43</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Iran Today*, London: Politico's, 2005, p.344

<sup>44</sup> This was even true under the rule of the shah. Hermann Frederick Eilts, 'Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy', in L. Carl Brown (ed.), *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers* (London: IB Tauris, 2004), p.237

<sup>45</sup> Shaul Bakhash, 'Iran's Foreign Policy under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000,' in Brown (ed.), *Diplomacy in the Middle East*, p.247

intention to export its revolutionary ideology throughout the Islamic world, thereby posing “a direct challenge to the regional status quo and the political integrity of Iran’s Arab neighbors.”<sup>46</sup> As previously noted, the Saudi government relies heavily on its association with a radical Sunni movement, Wahhabism. Wahhabist clerics maintain an ‘official line’ which states that Shi’ism is heretical, which sets the Saudi state at odds with the official ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Neither side can therefore acknowledge the validity of each other’s’ religious beliefs or system of government without undermining their own legitimacy, yet each aspires to a position of leadership in the Islamic world, creating the potential for serious friction. In addition, while Iranian attempts to export its revolution during the infancy of the Islamic Republic were spasmodic and uncoordinated (reflecting the upheaval in the Iranian government), they nonetheless inspired genuine alarm in the Gulf monarchies, and doubtless reflected the firmly-held worldview of powerful factions within Iran.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, while both states have successfully co-existed, there have been periods of deep antagonism between Iran and the Arab monarchies on the opposite shore of the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, even though there was a general trend towards pragmatism and away from radicalism in Iranian foreign policy a decade after the revolution.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, while the other states of the Persian Gulf have traditionally been dominated by Sunni Arabs (either politically, demographically or both), Iran is linguistically, ethnically, religiously and culturally different, dominated by Persian Shia. This is yet another potential source of conflict, and resurfaced once the Gulf states perceived a threat from the Iranian revolution.<sup>49</sup> It was subsequently used in propaganda by Saddam Hussein’s regime in the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ehteshami, ‘The Foreign Policy of Iran’, p.287

<sup>47</sup> Bakhsh, ‘Iran’s Foreign Policy under the Islamic Republic’, p.251-2

<sup>48</sup> Ehteshami, ‘The Foreign Policy of Iran’, p.287, p.298-9

<sup>49</sup> David Long, ‘The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf States’, in John Esposito (ed.) *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact* (Miami, FL: Florida International University Press, 1990), p.111

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Cockburn & Patrick Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein: An American Obsession* (London: Verso, 2002), p.59

#### 4.3.3 Iraq

Iraq represents a different kind of state, with its trajectory of development more influenced by external colonial rule. Unlike either Saudi Arabia or Iran, its origin as a modern state can be traced back to the era of European colonialism, as it was formed by the amalgamation of three Ottoman provinces at the end of the First World War. Its rulers have therefore struggled both with attempts to establish the legitimacy of their rule and to consolidate Iraq as a state, which has affected its foreign policy significantly. The most obvious aspect of this colonial legacy is in the ethnic and sectarian cleavages that have done much to define and dominate Iraq's politics, and indeed its political system. From the inception of the modern state of Iraq after the First World War to the American-led invasion of 2003, the political system of Iraq was based on the centralised, authoritarian rule of a series of relatively small and homogenous groups of Sunni Arabs, despite the fact that this ethnic and confessional group has likely never composed more than approximately 20% of the population in modern times.<sup>51</sup> In the case of the Hashemite monarchy, the government was dominated by a ruling class composed of the retainers of the royal family, former Ottoman civil servants and army officers, and large landowners,<sup>52</sup> and relied on "the army and bureaucracy as the mainstay of the state rather than political bargaining."<sup>53</sup> Following the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958 (which was more of a military coup than a popular revolution) the Sunni Arabs who dominated the Iraqi army's officer corps became the arbiters of political power, and it was their world-view that came to be dominant in Iraqi political discourse.<sup>54</sup> This was not changed significantly by the rise to power of the Ba'th Party and Saddam Hussein, except in the important sense that the base of the regime became narrower, centred ultimately on Saddam Hussein and "his close family members and cohorts."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p15

<sup>52</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2004), p. 22; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p44-51

<sup>53</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p.78

<sup>54</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p.153 and 186

<sup>55</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 139 and p.177

The majority of the population of Iraq was and is composed of Arab Shia, leading to persistent fears of a Shia ‘takeover’ on the part of the Sunni elite given their domination of the political system and its undemocratic character. The other large minority in Iraq are the Kurds, who are clustered in the north of the country, and have consistently agitated for autonomy or independence in the face of Arab domination of the state. This has led to recurring bouts of civil conflict and repression on the part of the Iraqi authorities, determined to centralise power and fearful of the appeal of transnational ideologies and secession. However, despite the fact that no single state existed in the area of modern day Iraq prior to the 1920s, and despite sharp ethnic and confessional differences amongst its population, Iraq was relatively successful in developing the institutions of a modern, unified state. The military, in particular, was seen by many of the early Iraqi elite as a central institution in the consolidation of the state, which they believed could be achieved in a top-down, authoritarian manner.<sup>56</sup> Iraq’s rulers, particularly Saddam Hussein, were subsequently able to use Iraq’s oil wealth, superpower patronage and relatively large population to create a formidable military machine following the dramatic oil price rises of the 1970s, making it a major player in Gulf politics and a potential threat to its neighbours, as Kuwait and Iran learned to their cost. Consequently, the size of Iraq’s military forces grew continuously between 1969 and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, when Iraq had almost a quarter of a million men under arms.<sup>57</sup> In fact, Iraq emerged even stronger from the 1980-88 war, if only in purely military terms, and “almost immediately made a bid for regional hegemony and expansion.”<sup>58</sup>

At different times throughout the post-war era, Iraq has been variously status quo and revisionist, albeit with some important qualifications. In the immediate post-war period Iraq was a western-aligned monarchy (it was the sole Arab member of the Baghdad Pact), and so found itself allied with Iran and Saudi Arabia against the forces of Arab nationalism (on a regional level) and the Soviet Union (globally). Following the revolution of 1958, the situation was

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<sup>56</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p.76 and p.92

<sup>57</sup> Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability*, fig 5.3, p.156

<sup>58</sup> Vasiliev, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, p.472

changed, becoming more complex. As we saw in the previous chapter, Iraq 'changed sides', becoming a client state of the USSR, and more significantly, adopted an Arab nationalist ideology that set it at odds with Tehran and Riyadh. Deriving its legitimacy from its radical, pan-Arab credentials, the rulers of modern Iraq have played an unusual role in the power politics of the Persian Gulf. Firstly, they have at various times sought to assert hegemony over the 'Arab 'side' of the region: the littoral states on the southern shore of the waterway. At the same time, Iraq has attempted to assert itself vis-à-vis Iran, as a Sunni Arab bulwark against Persian Shia Iran. It has therefore simultaneously represented both a threat and a champion to the Gulf monarchies. The policies that this has given rise to, and their effects on the dynamics of the regional system, are addressed in the following section.

#### **4.4 Tripolar dynamics in the Persian Gulf since World War II**

This section discusses the most significant events in regional politics in the post-war Persian Gulf up to 1991, primarily in balance of power terms, and the factors which have affected this the most. This is necessary to demonstrate how the factors described above have played out, and how this has facilitated American intervention.

Following the end of the Second World War, and the withdrawal of explicit colonial control from the Gulf region, the rulers of the three most consequential states had, at least on paper, relatively similar outlooks and objectives, in that all three were conservative monarchies. In this period, the primary threat was perceived to be radical Arab nationalism, symbolised by Nasser's Egypt, which appealed directly to the people of the Arab states, bypassing their rulers. There were also active communist parties in most Middle East states, but these proved to be much weaker in comparison. Although Iran was of course less open to pan-Arab rhetoric, it was the first to 'break ranks', under the leadership of Prime Minister Mossadegh, nationalising the British-dominated Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951, in a move that reflected an equally intense Iranian nationalism and scorn for external interference in Iranian

affairs, stemming at least in part from Iran's history of domination by Britain and Russia from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Mossadeh was removed from power by a western-backed coup in 1953, and the Shah subsequently ruled as a dictator and maintained a broadly pro-western foreign policy until his overthrow in 1979. As described in the previous chapter, while he remained opposed to Soviet presence in the Middle East his American patrons were content to support his ambitions to make Iran a regional superpower, allowing him to purchase vast amounts of military hardware in the 1970s, following the oil price rises which gave him access to the resources to make large-scale arms purchases.<sup>59</sup>

The shah subsequently despatched troops to suppress the Dhofar rebellion in Oman and sought changes in the Iran-Iraq border to favour Iran, going so far as to give military support to Kurdish insurgents inside Iraq. He eventually achieved this goal in the 1975 Algiers agreement, which redrew the border along the *thalweg* (median point) of the Shatt al-Arab waterway. He also ordered his armed forces to occupy some Gulf islands, the Tunbs, in 1971. Despite pursuing an aggressive foreign policy from the 1960s onwards,<sup>60</sup> Iran basically remained 'status quo' in its policies, not seeking to fundamentally alter the existence and political systems of other regional states. While the shah did offer military aid to Kurdish rebels inside neighbouring Iraq, therefore threatening its existence as a unitary state, this was immediately cut off when he achieved his goals. The shah therefore sought Iranian predominance, rather than to re-draw the map of the region.

Iraq remained in the 'conservative' camp throughout much of the 1950s, becoming a founding member of the 'Baghdad Pact' (latter renamed the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) following Iraq's withdrawal), which was designed to contain the Soviet Union in the Middle East and central Asia as NATO did in western Europe. The unpopularity of this alliance, perceived as another form of imperialist intrusion, was one of the reasons for the Iraqi revolution of 1958, a military coup which led to the downfall of the Iraqi monarchy and the rise of

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<sup>59</sup> Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, p.482-3. See also James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 1989)

<sup>60</sup> Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, p.465

more radical, revisionist forces to power.<sup>61</sup> The new government, dominated by military officers and led by Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim, was in turn overthrown by a more pan-Arabist faction of the same group in 1963 together with the Baath party, and was in turn supplanted by the Baath party alone in 1968. Despite this rapid turnover of leaders, Iraq pursued a much more revisionist foreign policy with relative consistency following 1958, expressing hostility towards both existing colonially-imposed borders and foreign influence in the region, and pursued a friendly relationship with the Soviet Union, signing a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1972. Most important of all, it had antagonistic relationships with Iran and the Gulf monarchies.<sup>62</sup> Qasim's government laid claim not only to both the oil-rich Iranian province of Khuzistan (which is ethnically Arab), but also to the state of Kuwait only days after its formal independence from Britain,<sup>63</sup> the latter sparking a regional crisis.<sup>64</sup> The Iraqi cabinet also passed a resolution to rename the Persian Gulf the 'Arab Gulf'. The results of this grandstanding were exacerbated by Iraqi demands to renegotiate the delineation of the Iran-Iraq border, especially along the vital Shatt al-Arab waterway. Following the Baath takeover in 1968, the situation became more tense, as "the new regime was eager to assert its Iraqi nationalist and pan-Arab credentials...It adopted socialism at home, a stridently anti-Western foreign policy, and a revolutionary rhetoric directed at conservative Persian Gulf and Arab regimes." It also supported 'national liberation' movements in Iran and Oman, and leftists in Yemen, as well as the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG).<sup>65</sup> This set Iraq at odds with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab monarchies, as well as the Shah's Iran. The border between the two countries along the Shatt al-Arab was a particularly heated point of contention. As already stated, Iranian support for Iraq's restless

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<sup>61</sup> David Commins, *The Gulf States: A Modern History* (London, IB Tauris, 2012), p.133

<sup>62</sup> Shaul Bakhash, 'The Troubled Relationship: Iran and Iraq, 1930-80', in Lawrence Potter & Gary Sick (eds.), *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (New York, NY; PalgraveMacmillan, 2004), p.12; Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p.146-8; Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf*, p.25

<sup>63</sup> Bakhash, 'The Troubled Relationship', p.16

<sup>64</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p.159-60, Marr; *The Modern History of Iraq*, p.109-111

<sup>65</sup> Bakhash, 'The Troubled Relationship', p.17

Kurds persuaded Iraq to agree to the Shah's demands in 1975. Overall, during the 1970s the rulers of Saudi Arabia and Iran co-operated to contain Iraq.<sup>66</sup>

The next major change in the sub-region was the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The outlook and goals of the leadership (and the leadership itself) of the area's largest and arguably most powerful state changed dramatically. Previously a status quo power, the newly-formed Islamic Republic of Iran became fiercely revisionist, denouncing both superpowers and the governments of its neighbours. While the Shah had sought to build up Iranian military power, Iran under his rule had co-existed with republican, nationalist Iraq and the other monarchies. In contrast, Iran's new leaders denounced both systems of government. While revolutionary Iran posed a threat to Iraq because of the latter's Shia majority and their shared border, it threatened Saudi Arabia because it undermined the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty: "After the revolution, Iran's strong Islamic-universalist approach and her demands for a leading position within the umma as well as its assumed role as a model for the world's Muslims challenged the very roots of the identity of the Saudi Arabian state and its ruling family as the heart of the Islamic world."<sup>67</sup> As stated above, this was made more acute by the presence of a downtrodden Shia minority in Saudi Arabia.

The consequences of the 1979 Iranian revolution for the Persian Gulf's systemic dynamics were also profound, producing a new set of incentives which affected the members of the system. The fragile triangular system of the Persian Gulf was highly sensitive, and the abrupt about-face of Iran had a significant impact. Generally speaking, it drove the Arab states together, as the differences between them became less important than the perceived threat of revolutionary Iran. This catalysed the foundation of the GCC in 1981 and the alignment of the members of this body with Iraq against Iran,<sup>68</sup> a reversal of the trends of the previous decade. Saudi Arabia was therefore forced into a U-turn, having previously aligned with Iran to contain radical Iraq; now that Iran was the most

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<sup>66</sup> Henner Fürtig, *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia Between the Gulf Wars*, p.62, and 'Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf', p. 628

<sup>67</sup> Fürtig, *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia*, p. xiv

<sup>68</sup> Henner Fürtig, *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia*, p.73



radical state and the biggest threat, Iraq became a viable ally, because it too was threatened by the Iranian revolution. Consequently, upon the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, Saudi Arabia gave Iraq extensive financial and logistic assistance, becoming, in effect, one of the chief ‘financiers’ of the Iraqi war effort, lending it a large proportion of the \$35-50 billion it received from the Arab states.<sup>69</sup> This was also true to some extent of the other members of what would become the GCC, with Kuwait as roughly the most pro-Iraqi/anti-Iranian and some of the sheikdoms of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) leaning more towards neutrality, thanks to pressures arising from geography, trade links and other factors.<sup>70</sup>

The most concrete manifestation of the fears of the Gulf states was the foundation of the GCC, comprising Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman.<sup>71</sup> This signalled a realisation that some form of consolidation was necessary, clustering together for mutual reinforcement even as they tried to play one side off against the other. The fact that Iraq was not considered for membership, and never was a realistic candidate, is illuminating: despite their reliance on it as a counterweight to Iran, Iraq was never trusted enough to be allowed a say in the security affairs of the six members.<sup>72</sup> The GCC was also formed in the face of fears of the smaller members of Saudi domination.<sup>73</sup> However, this was outweighed by the perceived danger of the Iranian revolution and the momentum the idea of the GCC had gained. Mistrust and balance of power dynamics therefore continued, despite the shock the system had endured.

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<sup>69</sup> Bakhash, ‘The Troubled Relationship’, p. 24

<sup>70</sup> Gerd Nonneman, ‘The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War: Pattern Shifts and Continuities,’ in Lawrence Potter & Gary Sick (eds.), *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (New York, NY; PalgraveMacmillan, 2004), p.168; Marschall, *Iran’s Persian Gulf Policy*, p.62

<sup>71</sup> Steve Yetiv, *Crude Awakenings: Global Oil Security and American Foreign Policy*(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p.54-5; Anwar-Ul-Haq Ahady ‘Security in the Persian Gulf after Desert Storm’, *International Journal*, 42 (2) 1994, p.224, David Long, ‘The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on the Arabia Peninsula and the Gulf States,’ p.113

<sup>72</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Gerd Nonneman, & Charles Tripp, *War and Peace in the Gulf: Domestic Politics and Regional Relations into the 1990s* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1991), p.45

<sup>73</sup> Nonneman, ‘The Gulf States and the Iran-Iraq War’, p.176; Scherazade Daneshkhu, ‘Iran and the New World Order’, in Tareq & Jacqueline Ismael (eds.), *The Gulf War and the New World Order: International Relations of the Middle East* (Gainesville, FL; University Press of Florida, 1994), p.304; Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf*, p.25-6

The general pro-Iraqi turn of the GCC endured for the course of the Iran-Iraq war, which dragged on in a bloody, brutal stalemate for eight years.<sup>74</sup> Initial Iraqi successes against a chaotic post-revolutionary Iran were quickly reversed, as Iran's revolutionary fervour found a new outlet in the war against Iraq. Following the recapture of Iranian territory, the Iranian leadership took the fateful decision to take the war into Iraq, with the aim of (at the least) overthrowing Saddam Hussein. Iraq subsequently found itself on the defensive, and relied on aid from the West and other Arab states to keep its economy and military functioning. While the other Gulf states consistently sought to keep channels of communication with Iran open, attempting to broker ceasefires and peace agreements, they generally maintained their pro-Iraqi policy out of fear of the consequences of an Iranian victory. Iranian successes on the battlefield intensified both these fears and willingness to aid Iraq, in particular the capture of the Fao Peninsula by Iranian forces in 1986, which sent "shock-waves all over the Gulf and the Arab world".<sup>75</sup>

The decision to form the GCC, the military weakness of its members and their mistrust of Iran and Iraq also led to dramatic developments in another important facet of the members' foreign and security policies: their reliance on the United States as an ally of last resort. This had always been present, but the pressures of the Iran-Iraq war brought it to the forefront of Gulf politics. Iraq had begun what became known as the 'Tanker War' in 1984 by launching air attacks against Iranian oil facilities and tankers in the Gulf. In doing so Baghdad hoped not only to damage Iran's ability to wage war, but also to provoke Iran into taking radical action, such as closing the Straits of Hormuz, which would (Iraq hoped) cause the US to intervene to stop the war.<sup>76</sup> This gambit was only partially successful, goading Iran into attacking Saudi and Kuwaiti shipping bound for Iraq in late 1986. This led Kuwait to appeal to the superpowers to escort its tankers, which the US agreed to do, on the condition that they be 'reflagged' with US colours. This, in turn, led to a substantial build-up of

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<sup>74</sup> A concise overview of the conflict can be found in Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War 1980-88* (Oxford, Osprey, 2002)

<sup>75</sup> Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p.48

<sup>76</sup> Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p.50

American naval power in the Gulf, along with some ships from other Western navies. Repeated clashes between the US and Iranian forces led the US Navy to launch 'Operation Praying Mantis', which led to the destruction of much of Iran's navy.<sup>77</sup>

While the US obviously had its own reasons for intervening, it should not be forgotten that it was also invited into the region by some regional states, who were willing to host its forces in order to ensure their own security from regional dangers. This was made even more apparent by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The Saudi government quickly requested American assistance, leading to the build-up of a quarter of a million US troops in the kingdom. This figure rose to half a million, plus allied Western and Arab contingents, for the shift to offensive operations that drove the Iraqi military out of Kuwait. While most of these forces were withdrawn at the conclusion of hostilities, a substantial American military presence remained in the Gulf throughout the 1990s to contain Iraq and safeguard the Gulf states. Despite some financial problems,<sup>78</sup> Saudi Arabia retained its unofficial dependence on the US as a security guarantor (no formal defence agreement exists between the US and Saudi Arabia),<sup>79</sup> with up to 5,000 US troops stationed in the country.<sup>80</sup> Formal security ties were established between the US and the other states of the GCC, especially Kuwait, and the US Navy's Fifth Fleet established its forward headquarters in Bahrain.<sup>81</sup> The 1980s and especially the 1990s therefore saw a massive increase in the American military footprint in the region, with the consent of a number of regional states, who lacked the capability to defend themselves.

The American military build-up stemmed at least in part from the breakdown of the triangular, tripolar system described by Fürting et al. While

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<sup>77</sup> An detailed description of US military operations in the Persian Gulf in 1987-88 can be found in chapter 7 of David Palmer's *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1992)

<sup>78</sup> Author interview with Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Washington DC, February 2011 ; Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, p.207-9 and p.219

<sup>79</sup> Gause, 'The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia,' p.195

<sup>80</sup> Ulrichsen, *Insecure Gulf*, p.28

<sup>81</sup> Herrmann & Ayres, 'The New Geo-Politics of the Gulf,' p.39; Ahady, 'Gulf Security after Desert Storm', p.231-2

Saudi Arabia and Iran were unwilling to put their ideological differences aside, they could not make common cause against an aggressive Iraq. Nor could Saudi Arabia and Iraq resume their old anti-Iranian alignment while Saddam Hussein's regime was in power, thanks to his attack on Kuwait. The Saudis, and the other members of the GCC, were therefore forced to look further afield for allies to provide them with an overarching security guarantee, once their traditional security policies became untenable and they remained militarily weak. An attempt to enlist Arab allies from outside the Persian Gulf after the 1991 war, the Damascus Declaration, proved to be a failure. This was partly due to the fears of the Gulf states of the effects of a permanent Egyptian and Syrian military presence in their territory, and partly because of the costs involved, Iranian hostility to the idea and the questionable military value of such a scheme.<sup>82</sup> The US therefore remained the ultimate guarantor of GCC security. Other precedents existed within the modern history of regional politics for this turn to external forces, especially the US, on the part of local states, albeit on a much reduced scale. As described above, the Saudi leadership found itself threatened by the tidal wave of Arab nationalism that found its initial expression in Egypt in the 1950s. Domestic unrest, especially in key sections of the military, panicked the monarchy into requesting American help. While the Saudis did make some gestures aimed at appeasing Nasser and the forces of pan-Arabism, King Saud nonetheless accepted (in private) the Eisenhower doctrine in 1957 and extended the lease on the American airbase at Dhahran until 1962, as well as agreeing to large increases in arms procurement and American training of Saudi forces.<sup>83</sup> From the Saudi perspective, the situation worsened after the outbreak of the war in Yemen in 1962, in which both Egypt and Saudi Arabia backed different sides. While Egyptian troops were present in Yemen in large numbers, several Saudi air force pilots defected to Egypt, creating serious doubts about the trustworthiness of the Saudi military. Subsequently, the Saudis requested the despatch of American combat aircraft to the Kingdom to bolster its air defences, a request which was granted, albeit reluctantly.<sup>84</sup> Again, help was not forthcoming from the most militarily-powerful Arab states, Egypt and Iraq,

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<sup>82</sup> Ahady, 'Security in the Persian Gulf after Desert Storm', p.219-23

<sup>83</sup> Vassiliev, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, p.352

<sup>84</sup> Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, p.58 and 67, Douglas Little, *American Orientalism*, p.238-9

because they were ideologically hostile. As would be the case in the 1980s and 1990s, regional divisions and issues conspired to motivate Persian Gulf states to rely on American forces.

## **4.5 Conclusions**

The Persian Gulf sub-region's politics was dominated by a tripolar balance of power system in the era following the Second World War, which saw the maturation and consolidation of the most significant regional states: Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq. The foreign policies pursued by these states were dominated both by the ambitions of their leaders (especially in the case of Iran) and the need to maintain domestic legitimacy, according to the shared and idiosyncratic features of each state. This was also strongly affected by the geopolitical situation in the Persian Gulf, the fact that the system of the three states encompasses a major religious and ethnic divide, and the presence in these states of a significant proportion of the world's known oil reserves.

Specifically, certain dynamics persisted within the system: the balancing of status quo states against revisionist ones, and attempts by the most powerful state, Iran, to assert its predominance and establish its own vision of the regional system, under the rule of both the Shah and the clerics. While this system persisted, and states could ally with one of the others to check the power and influence of the other(s), the penetration of external powers into the region was minimised. When the system broke down and the three states became mutually hostile, external powers, specifically the United States, were invited in to ensure the survival and interests of regional allies. This was also the consequence of the military weakness of Saudi Arabia and the GCC states, which could not or would not rely on their own resources to defend themselves. There were therefore 'pull' factors which contributed to drawing in the United States, factors which were generated by regional politics that were arguably only indirectly linked to wider, global political trends and phenomena.

The next chapter examines the American response to the strategic challenges its policymakers faced in the 1990s, and the conception and implementation of dual containment in the rest of the decade.

## **CHAPTER 5 Dual containment: Conception, evolution, implementation**

In this chapter the foreign policy of ‘dual containment’, both its introduction and implementation in the 1990s, will be examined. This is a necessary step in the examination and analysis of this policy, given its application to two countries within the Persian Gulf sub-region and the differing nature of the containment regimes of each. The relationship between Iran and Iraq on the one hand and the US on the other also developed in different, complex ways in the decade in question, necessitating a detailed study of the resulting shifts and alterations in policy. It will also illustrate the nature of the continuing American interest and concern for the security of the Persian Gulf in the 1990s and how this was reflected in its dual containment policy: the prevention of the domination of the Persian Gulf by a single hegemon, especially one hostile to the US and its perceived interests in the region.

The chapter argues that American policy towards Iran and Iraq in the 1990s was in many ways a continuation of earlier trends apparent in the Bush (1988-1992) administration, namely the preservation of a central US role in the Gulf security system, and the exclusion of Iran and Iraq. Nonetheless, the approach taken by the administration to each state was very different, and changes in the situation in Iran, Iraq, and domestic American politics led to shifts in policy throughout the decade.

The first section provides a ‘strategic overview’, describing the Persian Gulf as it appeared to American policymakers in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War and some of the dilemmas they faced. It also examines the rationales given for its adoption by senior officials in the Clinton administration. It is followed by a short description of the objections to the policy raised by some scholars and commentators, while the following two sections detail the actual measures taken by the US to ‘contain’ both Iran and Iraq, which are dealt with separately because of the differing nature of the containment regimes: multilateral in the case of Iraq, and unilateral in the case of Iran.

## 5.1 The Persian Gulf after 1991 and the birth of a new policy

As we saw in the previous two chapters, it was a combination of regional and global factors that simultaneously ‘pushed’ and ‘pulled’ the US into a close political and military engagement with the Persian Gulf in the second half of the twentieth century. As the century drew to a close, all of these factors remained pertinent, with the major exception of the perceived Soviet threat to the world’s oil supplies, which disappeared with the collapse of the USSR. Nonetheless, the US remained committed to its traditional policy: “to prevent any one country from establishing hegemony in the Persian Gulf.”<sup>1</sup> It was to this end that it reversed the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait and sought, through the UN, to disarm Saddam Hussein’s regime and thereby eliminate the threat he posed to the other Gulf states. Additionally, the US was concerned by the potential of Iran to exercise a dominant role in Gulf security, given its size, position, population and mineral endowments, as described in Chapter 4. Given the potential power of both of these states, and the behaviour they had recently exhibited (especially Iraq) these were therefore the obvious candidates for this role. The US would therefore take steps to ensure that this did not come to pass in the years after 1991, and the particular policy that was created and implemented was dubbed ‘dual containment’ by Clinton administration officials. In the words of one of the principal architects of the policy, “the United States needed to prevent each of the stronger regional powers from achieving a hegemonic position in the Gulf that would enable it to dictate the policies of the lesser states.”<sup>2</sup>

The shape of American policy prior to the announcement of dual containment by the Clinton administration can be seen in the approach adopted by Clinton’s predecessor, George Bush. The factors discussed above – the desire to maintain a favourable balance of power in the Persian Gulf region – can be seen in the decision not to ‘go to Baghdad’ and overthrow Saddam Hussein, or

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<sup>1</sup> John Mearsheimer & Stephen Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p.281

<sup>2</sup> Martin Indyk, *Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East*, (New York City, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2009), p.30



support the uprising of the Iraqi Shia after the ceasefire and the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The war was fought to return the region to the status quo that had endured before the invasion of Kuwait, and the Bush administration did not desire to make radical changes to the regional security architecture.<sup>3</sup> It did not wish to see either Iraq or Iran increase their regional influence. The winding down of the Cold War and the Iran-Iraq War also decreased the importance of the region and the intensity of American interest in it. Accordingly, when George H W Bush took office in 1989, the Persian Gulf remained an area of critical importance, thanks to its oil reserves, but occupied the attentions of area specialists within the US government, rather than senior policymakers. Consequently, Bush decided to retain the earlier policy of balancing against Iran by trying to maintain the relationship previously built up with Saddam Hussein's Iraq under Reagan, ostensibly in the hopes of moderating Iraqi foreign policy.<sup>4</sup>

As for Iran specifically, Bush did make some overtures to the Iranian leadership which appeared to be aimed at improving the antagonistic relationship between the two states and gaining assistance in freeing American hostages in Lebanon. He famously said that 'goodwill begets goodwill' during his inauguration speech but, as we shall see, these ultimately had little impact and President Bush did not choose to push too far, as the US did not respond to Iranian assistance on the hostage issue and seemed instead to view Iraq as a more congenial partner.<sup>5</sup> President Bush's defeat in 1991 at the hands of Bill Clinton rendered any intentions he had about pursuing this course further moot.

The policy of 'dual containment' was first defined and announced publically by Martin Indyk, who would serve as special assistant to President Clinton on Middle East affairs, Senior Director for the Middle East and South

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<sup>3</sup> F. Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.88

<sup>4</sup> George Bush & Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 1998), p.305-6

<sup>5</sup> Shireen Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), p.46-7

Asia on the National Security Council, US Ambassador to Israel and Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East for Near Eastern Affairs.<sup>6</sup> It originated in a review of Persian Gulf policy conducted by the incoming Clinton administration, and overseen by Anthony Lake, Clinton's first National Security Advisor. In practice, the interagency working group which considered options for policy towards Iran and Iraq was chaired by Indyk,<sup>7</sup> and he is credited by many as the principal architect.<sup>8</sup> Indyk announced the new administration's Gulf policy to the world at large at the annual Soref symposium of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) in May 1993.<sup>9</sup> According to Indyk, the phrase 'dual containment' emerged almost by accident in a conversation with a journalist. Originally, the interagency review recommended a policy of 'aggressive containment' towards Iraq and 'active containment' towards Iran (both are described in detail below). The journalist, Elaine Sciolino of the *New York Times*, told Indyk that it sounded like the US was set on a policy of 'parallel containment', a term Indyk adopted, after changing to 'dual containment.' Additionally, the policy was also outlined by the then-National Security Advisor Anthony Lake in an article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1994. Although in this article Lake identifies 'backlash states' as the focus of American concern, a category that includes Cuba, North Korea and Libya as well as Iran and Iraq, he dedicates the bulk of his article to discussing the latter two and the nature and application of 'dual containment', and uses that term in particular when referring to them.<sup>10</sup>

The content of Indyk's speech at WINEP and Lake's article are very similar, and it is therefore possible to draw out some common ideas that constitute the unique features of 'dual containment.' Among the most important of these was the decision to attempt the containment of Iran and Iraq

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<sup>6</sup> An Australian-born former academic, he had previously worked for the pro-Israel lobbying group the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), before founding the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP).

<sup>7</sup> Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, p.36

<sup>8</sup> Author interview with Ellen Laipson, former CIA, NSC, National Intelligence Council and State Department official, Washington DC, February 2011

<sup>9</sup> Martin Indyk, 'The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East' speech to the WINEP Soref Symposium 1993. The text of his speech is available here: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=61>, accessed 11-08-2010

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Lake, 'Confronting Backlash States', *Foreign Affairs* 73 (2) 1994, pp. 43-55

simultaneously, rather than relying on one of these states as a counterweight to the other, breaking with previous American policy in the Persian Gulf. The inevitable consequence of this decision was the assumption by the US of a more active role of the management of security in the region than hitherto, given the scalene nature of the sub-region's tripolar system (discussed in the previous chapter), arguably making the US almost a regional state. Both Lake and Indyk argued indirectly that this was necessary, not by stating that this entailed the US was to become the predominant security actor in the sub-region, but that it needed to construct a favourable balance of power in the Persian Gulf. Indyk argued that with the assistance of its traditional allies and as long as Iran and Iraq remained 'contained', the US will be able to "preserve a balance of power in our favor in the Middle East region".<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Lake stated that the "basic principle in the Persian Gulf region is to establish a favourable balance of power, one that will protect critical American interests in the security of our friends and in the free flow of oil at stable prices."<sup>12</sup> Both stated that one of the reasons for this decision to exclude both Iran and Iraq is that they are simply not necessary parts of any American-dominated security architecture: "we don't need to rely on one to balance the other."<sup>13</sup> In other words, neither state possessed the military power to give the US pause, or necessitate the enlistment of allies, stemming from the fact that both states were much weaker than the US and had been devastated by wars in recent years that enervated their armed forces, lowering the costs of American containment. This stemmed partly from the collapse of the USSR, which meant that for Iran and Iraq "their ability to play the superpowers off each other has been eliminated."<sup>14</sup> Lake also argued that since the 1991 Gulf War, the GCC states were more willing to co-operate with and host American forces, which "provide our military forces with an ability to deploy in the Persian Gulf against any threat that either Iraq or Iran pose to these states."<sup>15</sup> Both left unmentioned the massive arms purchases made by the GCC states from the US

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<sup>11</sup> Indyk, 'The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East'.

<sup>12</sup> Lake 'Confronting Backlash States', p.47-8

<sup>13</sup> Indyk, 'The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East'.

<sup>14</sup> Lake, 'Confronting Backlash States', p. 48

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.49

and others in the 1990s, aimed undoubtedly at deterring Iran and Iraq, and ‘locking in’ a US and Western role in regional security.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of the aims of the new American policy, both Lake and Indyk stressed that while ‘dual containment’ was designed to contain both states simultaneously, the means and objectives of the containment regimes differed, as did the nature of each state’s political system (this would lead the then-Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Edward Djerejian to attempt to remove the term ‘dual containment’ from the text of Indyk’s original address during the approval and drafting process. He was unsuccessful).<sup>17</sup> The difference, as stated by Indyk, was that Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq was “criminal...beyond the pale of international society and, in our judgement, irredeemable.”<sup>18</sup> Not only had it attacked both Iran and Kuwait, it was also used brutal methods to maintain itself in power. Iran, on the other hand, was also perceived by US policymakers as troublesome but not nearly to the same degree. With regards to Iran, the US objected to what it saw as Iran’s pursuit of missile and non-conventional weapons technology, sponsorship of terrorism, opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, subversion of US-allied governments and conventional military build-up.<sup>19</sup> It had, however, not launched any aggressive wars of conquest. Consequently, both Lake and Indyk stated that Washington was willing to negotiate with Iran if it altered its behaviour, and did not have fundamental objections to the character of the Iranian regime, meaning its avowedly ‘Islamic’ character and constitution.

The recognition of the differences between Iran and Iraq was reflected in the American approach to each state. As we shall see in the following sections, the Clinton administration continued the multilateral approach it had inherited from the Bush administration, working through the medium of the UN Security

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<sup>16</sup> Matteo Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf: Diplomacy, Security and Economic Coordination in a Changing Middle East*, London: IB Tauris, 2011, p.76-7

<sup>17</sup> Email correspondence between author and Ambassador Djerejian. See also Barbara Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2007), p.181

<sup>18</sup> Indyk, ‘The Clinton Administration’s Approach to the Middle East’. Lake described Iraq as “an international renegade” in ‘Confronting Backlash States,’ p.50

<sup>19</sup> Lake, ‘Confronting Backlash States’, p.52-3

Council to impose and maintain a sanctions and inspection regime aimed at disarming Iraq. This process was backed by the threat of force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and which was used on several occasions. This approach was viable in light of Iraq's past behaviour, and remained so while the other members of the Security Council were willing to, if not participate, then at least not object or actively frustrate it. Iran, on the other hand, was not subject to any UN resolutions ordering it to disarm and cease oppressing its population, and Iran policy was therefore pursued unilaterally, through US-based sanctions and diplomatic pressure on its trading partners. This, too, continued in the same vein as the policy pursued by President Clinton's predecessor, who had hinted at a rapprochement with Iran, but had not ultimately followed-up despite acquiring Iranian help in freeing American hostages in Lebanon.<sup>20</sup>

The term 'dual containment' itself proved to be a controversial one, and it disappeared from official discourse quite quickly. Indyk himself concedes that it was easy to misconstrue, especially the use of the word 'dual,' which suggests that the containment of Iran and Iraq was conducted in a similar fashion. As stated, there were substantial real differences between the containment regimes imposed by the US. The logic of the policy itself was also criticised by scholars and former officials as misguided, though it also found some defenders.<sup>21</sup> Gause, in particular, highlighted the geostrategic problems inherent in the containment of a state as large as Iran without international consensus, and the assumption of a dominant role in the management of the Persian Gulf security system on the part of the US. In contrast, he advocated a policy of selective engagement with Iran on regional issues.<sup>22</sup> His calls for echoed by some former executive branch officials, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft and Richard Murphy, who also advocated a move towards a strategy they dubbed 'differentiated containment,' and called for the resumption of trade links between the US and Iran.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, p.46-7; Giandomenico Picco, *Man Without a Gun: One Diplomat's Secret Struggle to Free the Hostages, Fight Terrorism, and End a War* (New York, NY: Times Books, 1999), p.3-7

<sup>21</sup> For instance, see Patrick Clawson, 'The Continuing Logic of Dual Containment,' *Survival*, 40 (1) 1998, pp.33-47

<sup>22</sup> F. Gregory Gause, 'The Illogic of Dual Containment,' *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (2) 1994, pp.53-66

<sup>23</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft, and Richard Murphy, 'Differentiated Containment,' *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (3) 1997, pp.20-30

Several scholars argue convincingly that the decision of the Clinton administration to seek the simultaneous containment of Iran and Iraq also stem in part from its concern with the issue that overshadows Middle East politics: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, specifically the ‘Oslo Process.’ Pollack, in particular, argues that “Throughout the Clinton administration, but especially early on, it was often Israel’s security concerns and the interrelated needs of the peace process that were the main prods to US action on Iran.”<sup>24</sup> This arose because a peace deal with the Palestinians and the ‘front-line’ Arab states would mean that “Israel’s other security concerns...had to be addressed. In other words, the administration had to do something about Iran.”<sup>25</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt echo this view, claiming that much of the rationale behind dual containment can be found in Washington’s desire to appease both its close ally, Israel, and the formidable pro-Israeli lobby in the United States itself. As a consequence, when it came to Iran, the Clinton administration “was willing to go along, largely because it was focusing on the Oslo peace process, and wanted to make sure Israel felt secure and that Iran, a potential spoiler, did not derail the process.”<sup>26</sup> Trita Parsi argues that Iran became an increasingly serious concern for Israeli policymakers following the 1991 Gulf War for various reasons, involving both domestic politics and national security.<sup>27</sup> He also describes the efforts of Israeli leaders to impress upon the Clinton administration their concerns about Iran, with the result that, given its investment in the Oslo Process, “[t]he Clinton administration was willing to go to great lengths to convince the Israelis and the Palestinians to remain on the path to peace, even if it meant escalating tensions with Iran.”<sup>28</sup> This was undoubtedly facilitated by the poor state of relations between the US and Iran since the revolution of 1979, which imposed no domestic political price in the US for pursuing a tough line against that state: if anything, the opposite was more likely to be the case. The closeness of bilateral

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<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York, NY: Random House, 2004) p.261

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.260

<sup>26</sup> Mearsheimer & Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, p.287-8

<sup>27</sup> Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.184-5

relations between the US and Israel also played a part, which made lobbying Congress to pursue the containment of Iran through sanctions much easier. These issues are discussed in more detail in chapters 6, 7, and 8, which deal exclusively with the impact of these variables on dual containment.

With the conceptual origins of the policy now dealt with, we can now turn to the details of its application towards both Iran and Iraq. In a sense, the case of dual containment is one in which ‘the devil is in the details,’ as how the policy was implemented reflects aspects of the broader context in which US foreign policy objectives are operationalized, in particular the impact of domestic political forces and concerns about the American relationship with Israel discussed above.

The following sections therefore describe the evolution of American attempts to contain Iraq and Iran, as the policy developed in Washington runs head first into the difficulties of the real world and is stretched and pulled into different shapes by the intervention of other actors within the American political system. It subsequently forms the basis for the examination of these underlying factors shaping this evolution of policy discussed in subsequent chapters.

## **5.2 Dual Containment and Iraq**

Though Iraq was by far the most visible target of American ‘dual containment’ policy, the sanctions that state was subjected to in the 1990s were implemented under the auspices of the UN Security Council rather than the US government. As stated above, Washington’s decision to pursue the ‘containment’ of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was based on the traditional American geostrategic principle for the security of the Persian Gulf, namely “to establish a favorable balance of power, one that will protect critical American interests in the security of our friends and in the free flow of oil at stable prices.”<sup>29</sup> This was endangered by the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which was interpreted by many

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<sup>29</sup> Lake, ‘Confronting Backlash States,’ p.47-8

American policymakers as an attempt by Saddam Hussein to seize a preeminent role in the Arab world in general and military predominance in the Persian Gulf in particular. This jeopardised America's interests as the first Bush administration perceived them, leading to the US involvement in the 1991 Gulf War to restore the status quo.<sup>30</sup> Iraq's attempts, uncovered by UN inspectors, to acquire nuclear and biological weapons and missiles to carry them (alongside its proven chemical arsenal) exacerbated this threat enormously. Though it was pursued through the UN, the rationale of American strategy in this instance was therefore obvious, and made both more urgent and more palatable to the rest of the world by the fact that Iraq under the rule of Saddam Hussein had attacked both Iran and Kuwait in the space of a decade.

### **5.2.1 Iraq, the US and UN sanctions**

The authorisation for the 'containment' of Iraq through sanctions, at least in regards to its non-conventional weapons programmes, originally stemmed from the adoption by the UN Security Council of Resolutions 687 and 688 in April 1991, and reinforced by Security Council Resolution 707 in August, following the end of the 1991 Gulf War. The first required Iraq to destroy its chemical and biological weapons and any missiles with a range greater than 150km. It also required Iraq to reaffirm its commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and foreswear the development of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, it required Iraq to provide details of its development programmes for these items, and authorised the creation of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) to oversee this process, together with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>31</sup> It was the longest resolution on record at that point in time,<sup>32</sup> and "held momentous implications for the future of Iraq."<sup>33</sup> Resolution 707 was a response to Iraqi attempts to obstruct and deceive the UN's inspectors,

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<sup>30</sup> F. Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.88

<sup>31</sup> Anthony Cordesman & Ahmed Hashim, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p.290-1

<sup>32</sup> Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, p.92

<sup>33</sup> Cockburn & Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein*, p.94



and revelations about the state of its nuclear weapons programme,<sup>34</sup> and demanded that the Iraqi government comply with this resolution, allow UNSCOM and the IAEA to operate without interference, and allow overflights by reconnaissance aircraft to check on Iraq's compliance and look for evidence of infractions. Resolution 688 condemned Iraq's repression of its population, in particular the Kurdish population in the wake of the 1991 uprising, and demanded that it cease. It would be used as justification for the creation of the 'No-Fly Zones' (NFZs) in the north and south of Iraq, which were enforced by the American, British and French air forces, which in turn led to frequent clashes with the Iraqi military. These came on top of earlier resolutions passed following the original Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 that placed a comprehensive embargo on all trade with Iraq, excepting only foodstuffs and medicines supplied on humanitarian grounds. This, of course, prevented Iraq from exporting oil, its main source of income. The economic sanctions were to remain in place until it was determined that Iraq was in compliance with the resolutions.<sup>35</sup> Iraq would therefore remain an international pariah until it was judged to have complied with UN resolutions. As a permanent member of the Security Council, and essentially the *primus inter pares*, the US had a great deal of influence over this process.<sup>36</sup>

In many ways the adoption of resolutions 687 and 707 set the pattern of the process that would follow over the next decade. The Iraqi regime attempted to wear down and eventually disband the sanctions regime while retaining the ability to manufacture non-conventional weapons, and only grudgingly co-operated with both the inspections process and the systems set up to manage to sanctions and distribute aid. In what became a regular pattern, "[t]he Iraqi government engineered confrontation after confrontation and backed down only after it had provoked a crisis or the UN Coalition responded with force."<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, Saddam Hussein's regime was unsuccessful at challenging both the

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<sup>34</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Neighbours Not Friends*, p.48

<sup>35</sup> Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), p.240

<sup>36</sup> As to whether or not the US intended to use sanctions to topple Saddam Hussein, this issue is discussed below.

<sup>37</sup> Cordesman & Hashim, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond*, p.292

sanctions and the inspections. The sanctions remained in force until the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the weapons inspectors from UNSCOM and the IAEA supervised the dismantling of Iraq's non-conventional arsenal, despite the Iraqi government's attempts to frustrate them.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, as we shall see, the consensus on maintaining the sanctions against Iraq eventually broke down, and the weapons inspectors withdrew from Iraq before it was officially certified to be fully compliant with the relevant Security Council Resolutions.

After various altercations, the final crisis that led to the withdrawal of UN inspectors from Iraq and scrapping of UNSCOM began in 1998, when Iraq announced that it was suspending cooperation with the inspectors, and demanded changes to the oversight and composition of UNSCOM itself in August of that year. This crisis represented Iraq's final 'big push' to lift the sanctions that crippled the Iraqi economy, and exploit the divisions in the permanent five members of the Security Council that had grown sharper as time had worn on. For instance, France refused to cooperate in the extension of the southern NFZ in September 1996 and pulled its forces out of the enforcement of the northern NFZ in December, whilst Russia had taken the lead in negotiating with Iraq during the previous crisis that Saddam Hussein had manufactured in 1997, agreeing to press for the end of sanctions if Iraq cooperated<sup>39</sup> (this proved insufficient and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan intervened personally to defuse the crisis). The permanent five members of the security council had also divided over the interpretation of Security Council Resolution 1154 of March 1998, which formalised the agreement reached between Saddam Hussein and Kofi Annan a month before. The US and UK argued that the phrase "severest consequences for Iraq" authorised military action in the case of Iraqi violation, while China, Russia and France disagreed.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Security Council Resolution 1198, adopted in September, which called on Baghdad to resume cooperation with the inspectors, also left the door open to compromise, offering in return for cooperation the promise of a comprehensive review of sanctions and the drawing

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<sup>38</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p.288

<sup>39</sup> Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.121

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.141-2

up of a 'roadmap' "describing what exactly Baghdad had to do to meet the UN requirements."<sup>41</sup>

Iraq was confident enough in October of 1998 that it "coupled its decision to stop cooperating with Unscm and the IAEA in inspecting and monitoring with a call for a rapid, comprehensive review of Iraq's compliance in disarmament linked to a timetable to lift sanctions."<sup>42</sup> However, it was not successful, and was seen even by sympathetic members of the Security Council as going too far.<sup>43</sup> The US (as before, with the UK as junior partner) responded by launching the biggest bombing campaign of Iraq since the 1991 war,<sup>44</sup> 'Operation Desert Fox,' which took place from December 16-19. If its intention was to force Iraq to allow the inspections to resume, it was unsuccessful. It was also the deathblow to the public consensus on maintaining sanctions amongst the Security Council, with both France and Russia calling for them to be lifted or modified substantially in the wake of the attacks. However, as the US was willing to use its veto to maintain the sanctions they remained in force.<sup>45</sup> In response to the calls to end the sanctions, the US and UK persuaded the Security Council to adopt Resolution 1284 in December 1999 (China, Russia and France abstained). It replaced UNSCOM with the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Committee (UNMOVIC), and allowed Iraq to sell unlimited quantities of oil for humanitarian purposes, as well as easing the regulations on the import of agricultural, educational and medical supplies and equipment. Iraq rejected the resolution, which meant no change in the sanctions regime.

Resolution 1284 also addressed another issue that had caused enormous complications for American 'dual containment' policy: the effect of years of strict sanctions on Iraq's population and infrastructure. Though the extent of the

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<sup>41</sup> Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.152

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.156

<sup>43</sup> Steve Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States and the Persian Gulf, 1975-2005* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 2008), p.110; Madeleine Albright & Bill Woodward, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 2003), p.285

<sup>44</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p.289

<sup>45</sup> Steven Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security: The Foundations of the War on Terror* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2007), p.149-51

damage done to Iraq, and who was ultimately to blame for it, quickly became a bitterly-contested political issue, it was by all accounts catastrophic. This developed despite the creation of an ‘oil-for-food’ programme under Security Council Resolution 986 of April 1995, which allowed Iraq to sell a \$2bn worth of oil every six months to meet the humanitarian needs of its population. The limit was subsequently raised by Resolution 1153 in February 1998 to \$5.256bn, while Resolution 1284 proposed abolishing the limit altogether. It also addressed complaints stemming from the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1051 in March 1997, which required that all imports into Iraq of potentially ‘dual-use’ items (that is, items which could be used either for strictly civilian applications or in the creation of banned non-conventional weapons) be approved by a UN sanctions committee. This was an extensive list, which, for instance, made it extremely difficult for Iraq to import spare parts and upgrades for its sewage treatment systems and other parts of the state infrastructure critical for public health. As a result, it is well-documented that the economy of Iraq and the well-being of the majority of its people declined drastically. Socio-economic indicators declined “from the economic and social level of Greece to that of the barren sub-Saharan wasteland of Mali.”<sup>46</sup> This in turn created a groundswell of support for the lifting or easing of sanctions amongst Arab and Western publics as the suffering of the Iraqi people became increasingly well-publicised.

### **5.2.2 ‘Containment’ vs. ‘Regime change’**

Some debate exists amongst scholars and observers as to the extent of American desire for ‘regime change’ in Iraq during the Clinton administration: was it always present, or did it eventually crystallise into its final form after a period of time? Yetiv, for instance, asserts that this was an implicit, unspoken goal of American policy, and which became much more appealing and thus more openly discussed by American policymakers after 1998, after the sanctions regime began to fray.<sup>47</sup> This is made more credible by the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act (ILA) through Congress in that year, though as we shall see the

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<sup>46</sup> Andrew Cockburn & Patrick Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein: An American Obsession* (London: Verso, 2002), p.138

<sup>47</sup> Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, p.106

legislature and executive were at times at odds over Persian Gulf policy during the Clinton administration. Covert American attempts to unseat Saddam Hussein can be traced back to 1996, though these were not overt, unilateral efforts on a par with the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.<sup>48</sup> Wright maintains that the Clinton administration had two Iraq policies, one tactical (multilateral containment), and one strategic (regime change).<sup>49</sup> However, the latter was obviously not achieved, and the US went to considerable lengths to maintain and enforce the sanctions. Even if we accept that ‘regime change’ in Iraq became official American policy thanks to Congressional legislation in 1998, it was not undertaken during the timeframe examined in this thesis. The aforementioned Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 appropriated US\$97million and obliged the President to nominate opposition groups for the receipt of training, funds and equipment to overthrow Saddam Hussein, not to intervene with the US military to oust him from power. Moreover, this legislation did not originate from within the executive branch, but rather from Republican legislators in Congress, who had become frustrated with US policy towards Iraq and Saddam Hussein’s continued hold on power.<sup>50</sup> Although Clinton signed the act and subsequently declared after the conclusion of Operation Desert Fox that American policy was now to overthrow Saddam Hussein, he was still unwilling to do so unilaterally and with military force.<sup>51</sup> The declaration of an official policy of ‘regime change’ was also a part of, in the words of Madeleine Albright, a shift of policy “from containment with inspections to an approach we called containment plus. We counted upon allied military forces in the region to keep Saddam in his box, while we took other steps to weaken him.”<sup>52</sup> This dovetailed with the opinion of the President’s military advisors and the head of US Central Command (CENTCOM), General Anthony Zinni, who stated that containment was, in his

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<sup>48</sup> Cockburn & Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein*, p.219-230; Hiro, *Neighbours Not Friends*, p.106; Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, p.102

<sup>49</sup> Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security*, chapter 5.

<sup>50</sup> Author interview with Dr. Mark Lagon, former Deputy Director House Republican Policy Committee and former staff member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington DC, February 2011; Author interview with Bruce Reidel, former CIA and NSC official, Washington DC, February 2011

<sup>51</sup> Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, p.112-3

<sup>52</sup> Albright, *Madam Secretary*, p.287

words, “a pain in the ass”,<sup>53</sup> but represented the least worst option. This attitude was itself reflected in the national security establishment as a whole: “The Saddam Must Go School...was a dissident minority voice, generally disdained by those holding power in the US government.”<sup>54</sup> The relatively recent revelation that President Clinton signed presidential findings authorising the CIA to attempt to topple Saddam Hussein upon reaching office does little to change this picture.<sup>55</sup>

Overall, Gause’s view of this issue is the most convincing: “It [the US] did not like Saddam Hussein’s regime, but was not willing to do much to get rid of it.”<sup>56</sup> Despite some covert action programmes, the US did not escalate the drawn-out confrontation with Iraq beyond what its leaders believed was necessary to keep Saddam Hussein’s regime, to use Albright’s phrase, ‘in his box’. Even if the sanctions regime the US insisted on enforcing was aimed at undermining it to the point that it would collapse or be overthrown, this was the upper limit of what the Clinton administration was willing to countenance during its tenure, and either couldn’t or wouldn’t change when it became clear that Saddam Hussein was able to cling onto power. National Security Advisor Sandy Berger summed up this attitude in 1998, while being profiled by *The Washington Post*:

I’ve always said containment is aesthetically displeasing but strategically sufficient...You wake up in the morning and [Saddam Hussein] is still there and it would be preferable if he wasn’t. As for ‘getting Saddam’, most Americans would recognize that option would be emotionally gratifying, but the costs of it would be greater than our national interests.<sup>57</sup>

### 5.2.3 Was Iraq successfully contained?

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<sup>53</sup> Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (London: Penguin, 2006) p.22

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.12

<sup>55</sup> Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, p.41

<sup>56</sup> Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p.88

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Frank Ahrens, ‘The Reluctant Warrior; National Security Advisor Sandy Berger , a Onetime Dove Who Has Learned the Value of Claws’, *The Washington Post*, February 24, 1998

In the case of Iraq, American 'dual containment' policy was a relative success. Even if Saddam Hussein remained in power, his ability to threaten American interests in the Persian Gulf was minimal by the end of 2001. The successes that UNSCOM had in seeking out Iraq's arsenal substantially reduced the threat it posed, and the continuing sanction regime ensured as far as possible that his government was denied the means to reconstruct it. Irrespective of the damage done to the Iraqi people, and the public image of the US, Iraq arguably represented less of a security threat to American interests in the Persian Gulf at the end of the Clinton administration, as they were defined by American policymakers, than it did at the start. The downfall of Saddam Hussein, while always desired by the US government, was regarded as too troublesome to undertake under Clinton, given the likely costs and consequences.

### **5.3 Dual Containment and Iran**

As stated above, American policymakers regarded Iran as a potential danger to US interests in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East. The anti-American and anti-monarchical legacy of the 1979 revolution was still strong, and this was reflected in official Iranian discourse and the decision of the Reagan administration to 'tilt' in Iraq's favour during the Iran-Iraq War. The ensuing hostage crisis and the Iran-Contra affair also cast a long shadow over American-Iranian relations. While US policymakers stated that the US did not have a policy of 'regime change' for Iran, they were determined to limit Iran's ability to threaten the status quo in the Persian Gulf, especially by building an arsenal of non-conventional weapons. A more detailed description of American perceptions of Iranian (and Iraqi) threats to US interests is given in the following chapter. The account that follows attempts to remain as close to a simple enumeration of the extensive measures enacted by American policymakers to isolate and pressurise Iran, and detail the means by which it differed from that of the policy towards Iraq. This account also describes the evolution of the American containment regime towards Iran, and the ways in which it evolved to

adapt to the changing situation in Iran and the Gulf, and within US domestic politics.

In contrast to Iraq, American ‘containment’ of Iran was not conducted through the UNSC. Unlike Iraq, Iran had not launched any aggressive wars that had drawn the ire of enough of the world to make mobilising the ‘peace enforcement’ mechanisms of the UN Charter feasible. The other littoral states, in particular Saudi Arabia, maintained defence cooperation with the US but also renewed and deepened diplomatic relations with Iran during the 1990s, though they still desired American protection, seeing Iran primarily as a rival. The measures that the US took to limit the influence of Iran and frustrate its attempts to rebuild its armed forces reflected this. However, as well as seeking to contain Iran, the Clinton administration also sought to improve relations when it perceived the opportunity to do so, recognising that it was unwise to remain in an antagonistic relationship with the largest state in the region. Nonetheless, their attempts to do so were heavily circumscribed: by other players in the American policymaking process outside the executive branch with differing agendas, by groups opposed to this in the Iranian body politic, and ultimately by the poisonous legacy of previous US-Iranian relations. This meant that the moves towards reconciliation by the Clinton administration were fitful, and punctuated by intercessions by the legislative branch of the American government, which went some way towards determining the tone and the timing of American policy and complicated the process. In particular, activism by some members of Congress forced the executive branch into retrograde motion in its policymaking. This also had a ‘chilling effect’, making American attempts to reach any accommodation with Iran slower and more difficult (which will be discussed more fully in the following chapters). Nonetheless, despite the difficulties experienced by American policymakers, the Clinton administration did eventually make efforts to improve relations with Iran once it perceived the chance to do so.

### **5.3.1 Iran and US sanctions**



It would be an understatement to say that the Iranian half of ‘dual containment’ was not without precedent in recent American foreign policy. In fact, “When President Clinton assumed office in 1993, he inherited a wide array of executive and legislative constraints imposed by Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush on Iran to block most military and many economic transactions between the two states.”<sup>58</sup> These measures proliferated in the following years. The story of US sanctions on Iran in the 1990s begins with the Iran-Iraq Non-proliferation Act of 1992. In many ways it clearly summed up the concerns that US policymakers held about Iran, and prefigured later measures in the Clinton administration. Despite its name, the act (sponsored by Senators John McCain and Al Gore) was aimed primarily at Iran, given that “Iraq was under the most comprehensive embargo ever imposed by the UN” at the time it was passed.<sup>59</sup> It “suspended the ability of the United States government to engage in trade with Iran, issue trading licences and provide economic and technical assistance”, and explicitly banned the transfer of technologies that could be used in non-conventional weapons development, as well as advanced conventional weapons “of a size or type that would have a destabilising impact on the region.”<sup>60</sup> Although it was enacted during the Bush (senior) administration, there were some features of the act that would recur in measures enacted under Clinton: it was extra-territorial, extending its provisions to non-US states and firms, and it was introduced by Congress without any substantial direction from the executive branch. In fact, it became law despite disapproval from the executive branch, and was criticised by President Bush for impinging upon the Presidency’s responsibility for foreign policy.<sup>61</sup> In addition, it took aim at two developments that were of particular concern to American policymakers in these branches of the federal government: the fact that US-Iranian trade links were relatively strong (considering the circumstances), and the willingness of post-Soviet Russia to sell advanced weapons systems to Iran. Overall, it arguably “marked the onset of a clear unilateral containment strategy towards

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<sup>58</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.120

<sup>59</sup> Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.201

<sup>60</sup> Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security*, p.100

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

Iran”<sup>62</sup> as well as symbolising American determination to ‘manage’ the security system of the Persian Gulf.

The next significant sanctions imposed by the US were a pair of ‘Executive Orders’ introduced by President Clinton, numbers 12957 of March 1995, and 12959 of April of the same year. The first forbade US citizens from working or investing in the Iranian petroleum industry. The second essentially forbade US-Iranian trade, shutting down economic ties with Iran. The context in which these were introduced requires some examination, as it illuminates an important aspect of American-Iranian relations in this era. While the use of executive orders would, on first sight, suggest that this was a unilateral measure by the executive branch, this would be incorrect. In fact, they represented an attempt by President Clinton to retain the initiative in American policymaking with regards to Iran, and were designed to ‘head off’ stricter measures that were, at the time, being debated in Congress. More specifically, the first order, barring American involvement in the Iranian oil industry, was a response to Congressional disapproval of a deal struck between Iran and a subsidiary of the American DuPont Corporation, Conoco, to develop Iran’s Sirri A and E oilfields. At the time this reflected another fact that sat uncomfortably alongside official American disapproval of Iran: the fact American companies bought 30% of Iran’s exported oil<sup>63</sup> (a legal transaction provided it was not subsequently sold in the US)<sup>64</sup>, and an increasingly-important importer of American goods.<sup>65</sup> The order was also introduced a day before debate was scheduled to begin in Congress on Senator D’Amato’s Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Bill,<sup>66</sup> which the White House opposed. The order was unsuccessful at shutting down legislative attempts to direct American Iran policy. In response to presidential opposition, Senator D’Amato tabled the Iran Foreign Sanctions Act, which included provisions for extra-territorial sanctions on foreign bodies that traded with Iran,

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<sup>62</sup> Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security*, p.101

<sup>63</sup> Gerges, *America and Political Islam*, p.120-1

<sup>64</sup> Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.209

<sup>65</sup> Geoffrey Kemp, *Forever Enemies?: American Policy and the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 1994) p.3

<sup>66</sup> Donette Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations since the Islamic Revolution* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p.98

in late March. Clinton's second Executive Order was therefore another attempt to pre-empt legislation working its way through Congress and retain the initiative in foreign policymaking, at least where Iran was concerned.<sup>67</sup> He duly announced that he was severing American trade links with Iran at a meeting of the World Jewish Congress in April 1995, which was swiftly followed by the promulgation of Executive Order 12959.

However, the executive orders banning US-Iranian trade still fell short of the measures proposed in Senator D'Amato's bill, as it lacked the extra-territorial aspect. As a result of this pressure, President Clinton announced that he would seek the assistance of the G7 in introducing new sanctions against Iran at the scheduled meeting of the group in Nova Scotia in June 1995. In return, Senator D'Amato and his allies agreed to postpone the reading of their legislation. The unwillingness of the other members of the G7 to co-operate in sanctioning Iran was not altered by Clinton's entreaties. Consequently, Senator D'Amato and other legislators in both the House and the Senate pressed ahead with their legislative programme for Iran. This would result in the passage of another act of Congress that strongly influenced American-Iranian relations, the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of 1996. In September 1995, Senator D'Amato introduced the Iran Foreign Oil Sanctions Act, which was specifically directed at non-American firms, in contrast to the earlier bill (the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Act), and in the face of stated unwillingness of the executive branch to sanction foreign entities trading with Iran.<sup>68</sup> The bipartisan support this legislation attracted forced the White House to compromise (intervention by Senator Edward Kennedy ensured that the act also targeted Libya in an attempt to force Gaddafi to cooperate with the investigation into the Lockerbie bombing). ILSA was passed by Congress in June 1996, and signed into law by President Clinton in August. It gave the President the authority to impose two of the following sanctions on any foreign entity that invested more than \$40m in the Iranian or Libyan energy industries: "import and export bans; embargoes on lending by US banks, a ban on US procurement of goods and services from

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<sup>67</sup> Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security*, p.109

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p.111

sanctioned companies; and a denial of US export financing.”<sup>69</sup> In addition, sanctioned companies would not be permitted to receive American technology that required an export licence.<sup>70</sup> As a compromise gesture it allowed the White House to issue waivers on the grounds of national security, or that the sanctioned company’s home country had introduced sanctions of its own that made American measures unnecessary.

ILSA proved to be extremely controversial internationally, though it passed through Congress with majorities large enough to make a presidential veto impossible. The international controversy, with close allies, contributed to making it highly unpopular in the executive branch, so much so that “for many, “hated” was too mild a word”, given that it contradicted the stated American policy of advancing international free trade (the extraterritorial sanctions violated WTO rules), and jeopardised American attempts to gain the cooperation of the EU, Japan and others in advancing this agenda.<sup>71</sup> This was not the only Congressional intervention in American-Iranian relations. In between the tabling of ILSA in its original form in September 1995 and its entry into the statute book in mid-1996, the House of Representatives appropriated \$18m to fund anti-regime activities in Iran in a confidential resolution at the end of December 1995.<sup>72</sup> Representative Newt Gingrich, the Speaker of the House, was largely responsible, adding it to the classified section of the yearly appropriation for intelligence operations. It became a sticking point in negotiations over the budget between the Senate and the White House, leading to the leak of its existence to the media and a predictably furious response from the Iranian government. Representative Gingrich had previously called for the overthrow of the Iranian regime in a series of newspaper columns.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, the White House decided to compromise on this issue also, and ensured that the money was

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<sup>69</sup> Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, p.101

<sup>70</sup> Hiro, *Iran Today*, p.201

<sup>71</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p.287

<sup>72</sup> Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.219

<sup>73</sup> ‘Gingrich “Add” for Covert Action Iran: 1995’ GlobalSecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/ops/iran-gingrich.htm> accessed 07-10-2010; Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, p.100

allocated to changing the policy of Iran, and not overthrowing the regime,<sup>74</sup> which was considered impossible and too dangerous to attempt by the American intelligence services.<sup>75</sup> The Iranian government publically allocated an equal amount to counteract American efforts in Iran and announced that it intended to register official complaints against the US with international legal bodies.<sup>76</sup>

ILSA was the catalyst for a serious disagreement with America's European allies (as well as Japan and Canada), who almost immediately announced that they would not abide by its restrictions (despite these claims, Pollack argues that the sanctions contained in ILSA were in some measure successful in that some firms chose not to invest in Iran in order to maintain their ability to operate in the US market).<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, it seriously degraded the goodwill that the US required to persuade other states to put economic pressure on Iran, leading Martin Indyk, one of the principal authors of 'dual containment', to label them 'a disaster.'<sup>78</sup> Unsurprisingly, the UK, France and Germany and the rest of the EU chose to continue to pursue their own approach to Iran, despite US pressure, which was dubbed 'critical dialogue.'<sup>79</sup> This "consisted of encouraging trade and other interactions with Iran for the purposes of generating interdependence and giving Iran a vested interest in the status quo while promoting dialogue over Iran's problematic behavior."<sup>80</sup> despite looming bones of contention between Iran and the UK, France and Germany: the Salman Rushdie affair with regards to the UK, and the assassinations of former Iranian PM Shapour Bakhtiar in Paris in 1991 and several Iranian Kurdish leaders in Berlin in 1992 by agents of the Iranian state. Consequently, the EU Commission threatened retaliation if the US actually sanctioned any European companies under ILSA and Germany renewed its export-credit guarantees with Iran. ILSA also proved ineffective at checking the behaviour of America's other allies: Japan threatened to lodge a complaint with the World Trade Organisation

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<sup>74</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p.275

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p.274

<sup>76</sup> Hiro, *Iran Today*, p.267

<sup>77</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p.288

<sup>78</sup> Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies*, p.183

<sup>79</sup> Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, p.97

<sup>80</sup> Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy*, p.101

(WTO), and shortly after ILSA was signed into law the Islamist Prime Minister of Turkey, Erbakan travelled to Iran and signed a \$20bn deal for natural gas.<sup>81</sup>

Overall, the economic relationship between Iran and the EU was considered too important by both parties to be jeopardised by any of these issues. When a German court ruled in 1997 that complicity in the 1992 assassinations went all the way to the top of the Iranian government, the EU states (except Greece) briefly withdrew their ambassadors from Iran in protest but did not contemplate cutting trade ties.<sup>82</sup> The EU also wrung concessions from the US regarding the application of ILSA. Following the passage of the act, Iran signed a \$2bn investment contract with Gazprom of Russia, Petronas of Malaysia and Total SA of France in September 1997 to develop an offshore gas field. The EU subsequently lodged a formal complaint against ILSA at the WTO in Geneva at the end of that year, although both sides subsequently agreed to settle the matter bilaterally. They finally did so in May of 1998, at a meeting of Jacques Santer, British prime minister Tony Blair (at the time presidents of the European Commission and the European Council respectively) and President Clinton.<sup>83</sup> Here, the EU extracted a waiver for the Total SA deal, and future deals, under section 9 (c) of ILSA (on the grounds that it benefited US national interests), in return for the promise to “work harder to prevent the transfer to Iran of materials and technology” that could be used for non-conventional weapons.<sup>84</sup>

The US also used other channels to put pressure on Iran. One of these was the policy of restricting Iranian access to financing and debt-restructuring from international organisations.<sup>85</sup> This was matched by attempts to prevent Iran from buying modern armaments to re-equip its military after the Iran-Iraq War. One example was the 1997 purchase by the US of the bulk of the Moldovan air

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<sup>81</sup> Hiro, *Iran Today*, p.262

<sup>82</sup> Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.221-2

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.234

<sup>84</sup> Alikhani, *Sanctioning Iran*, p.330

<sup>85</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p.289

force's inventory of combat jets, ostensibly to prevent their sale to Iran.<sup>86</sup> The Clinton administration also pressured Russia not to export weaponry to Iran, with mixed success. Wright states that "The degree of concern about Iran's procurement of Russian armaments and technology was so high within the Clinton administration that Clinton raised it as a serious concern with President Yeltsin at their summit meetings."<sup>87</sup> As a result of this pressure, Vice-President Al Gore reportedly reached an agreement with Russian PM Victor Chernomyrdin in 1995 which stated that Russia would honour its existing arms contracts with Iran, but refrain from further exports. Consequently, the US was unable to prevent Iran from acquiring some modern weaponry, such as Russian Kilo-class diesel-electric attack submarines for its navy.<sup>88</sup> This was followed in 1998 by the sanctioning of several Russian organisations by President Clinton through an Executive Order under the 1992 Iran-Iraq Non-proliferation Act, following an Iranian ballistic missile test.<sup>89</sup> This move was also partly a response by more pressure from Congress, which Alikhani argues was itself a response to Clinton's decision to waive sanctions on Total and its partners. This measure, "a new unilateral sanction against Iran", was the Iran Missile Proliferation Sanctions Act (IMPSA) of 1998, which passed in the Senate in May and the House in June, before being vetoed by President Clinton.<sup>90</sup> It was likely the threat of a Congressional override of this veto that led to the 1998 sanctions, which were extended to three more Russian firms in 1999.<sup>91</sup>

As stated above, Iran's development of nuclear technology was a major concern of the US. Russia was a prominent target of congressional and White House ire because of its involvement in Iran's nuclear power programme. As early as August of 1992, Russia agreed to construct a nuclear power plant near the Iranian city of Bushehr and supply uranium fuel enriched to 20%. This was

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<sup>86</sup> Arms Control Association, 'U.S. Buys Moldovan Aircraft to Prevent Acquisition by Iran', *Arms Control Today*, October 1997, [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997\\_10/moldoct](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997_10/moldoct) accessed 23-09-2010

<sup>87</sup> Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security*, p.98

<sup>88</sup> Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.223

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p.234

<sup>90</sup> Hossein Alikhani, *Sanctioning Iran: Anatomy of a Failed Policy* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), p.332-3

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p.334

followed two years later by an \$800m deal between Russia and the Iranian Atomic Energy Authority to build two light-water nuclear reactors and generators, each capable of generating 1,000MW of electricity.<sup>92</sup> Although this was the same technology that the US had agreed to export to North Korea,<sup>93</sup> it led to threats by senior figures in Congress to cut off aid to Russia over the issue,<sup>94</sup> indicating that “the US was willing to risk a crisis with Russia by putting the Russian-Iranian reactor before its priorities for the May US-Russia summit.”<sup>95</sup> China, another of Iran’s international partners on its nuclear development programme, was also subjected to American pressure. Warren Christopher, his successor as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the administration made strenuous efforts to persuade the Chinese government to downgrade its cooperation and commercial dealings with Iran’s nuclear authority, reportedly going so far as to making it a condition of continued US-Chinese trade in nuclear technology.<sup>96</sup> As a result of these concerns, the final sanction imposed under the Clinton Administration in this area was the Iran Nonproliferation Act, signed into law by President Clinton in March of 2000, after two years of political pressure from Congress following his veto of the IMPSA in 1998. This time, Clinton relented on the stated grounds that this Act, in contrast to IMPSA, gave the executive branch enough flexibility: while it required the President to ‘name and shame’ proliferators to Congress and gave the President the power to sanction them, it did not compel the imposition of sanctions, or require the issue of a formal waiver if they were not imposed.<sup>97</sup> This followed a further congressional measure to put pressure on Iran’s nuclear programme from the previous year, in August of 1999, when the House of Representatives “cut US funding for the IAEA by the exact amount that the Agency was assisting Iran with the construction of Bushehr.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Hiro, *Iran Today*, p.285-6

<sup>93</sup> Arms Control Association, *Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy*, <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron> accessed 27-09-2010; Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, p.100

<sup>94</sup> Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, p.98

<sup>95</sup> Geroges, *America and Political Islam*, p.123

<sup>96</sup> David Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran: Birth of an Atomic State* (London: IB Tauris, 2012), p.136-7

<sup>97</sup> Matthew Rice, ‘Clinton Signs ‘Iran Nonproliferation Act,’’ *Arms Control Today*, April 2000, [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000\\_04/irnap00](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_04/irnap00) accessed 27-09-2010

<sup>98</sup> Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, p.145



In reviewing all of these measures in totality something important becomes obvious: one thing many of the measures discussed above had in common, aside from the fact that they were all unilateral measures adopted by the US rather than the ‘international community’ (as in the case of Iraq), is that they were either heavily influenced or created by political actors outside the executive branch. Some cases are obvious. ILSA, for example, a piece of legislation conceived and implemented by the legislature in the face of disapproval from the White House. Even in cases of presidential sanctions, such as Executive Orders 12957 and 12959, these were reactions to pressure from Congressional sources, and attempts to forestall legislation and thus retain the initiative in regards to foreign policymaking. The Conoco case is an illuminating one in this regard. The US State Department was aware that Conoco was negotiating with Iran, and had not objected to the deal.<sup>99</sup> On the Iranian side, the awarding of the contract to an American firm was a signal by the government of Hashemi Rafsanjani that it sought improved relations with the US.<sup>100</sup> All of this proved to be irrelevant. When the first executive order failed to dampen criticism of Clinton’s Iranian policy and the march towards legislative sanctions, the second was introduced in the hope that this would be sufficient. While they did completely bar trade with Iran, as executive orders rather than legislation they theoretically left the power to overturn the ban in the hands of the president, rather than the legislature. This was also the case with the Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000, which, as described above, reached the statute book only after a two-year rearguard action by the executive branch, and was only deemed acceptable because it conceded the decision to apply the Act in each case to the White House. This leads Wright to argue that, in regards to Iran, Congress “restricted the options available to the executive branch and, in essence...usurped the foreign policy prerogative of the President.”<sup>101</sup> The implications of this are discussed more fully in chapter 7.

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<sup>99</sup> Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, p.99

<sup>100</sup> Alikhani, *Sanctioning Iran*, p.182-3

<sup>101</sup> Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security*, p.94

### 5.3.2 US-Iranian attempts at reconciliation: 1997 onwards

The reluctance of the executive branch to impose sanctions on Iran (relative to that of some members of Congress) was equalled by a desire to achieve a reconciliation with a state that was too important to ignore and too expensive to contain, at least if there was an alternative. Madeleine Albright (US Ambassador to the UN and Clinton's second Secretary of State) summed up this attitude when she wrote that both she and President Clinton "were intrigued by the possibility of better relations with Iran, whose strategic location, cultural influence, and size made it a pivotal state in one of the world's most combustible regions."<sup>102</sup> This drive was given an added impetus following the surprise election of Mohammed Khatami to the presidency of Iran in May 1997, when it seemed that American-Iranian relations had reached a nadir following the passage of ILSA and the imposition of other sanctions. The administration made several attempts to 'break the ice' with Iran under Khatami, especially in the wake of a now-famous interview he gave to CNN journalist Christiane Amanpour at the beginning of 1998 in which he called for a 'dialogue of civilisations', spoke of his respect for the US and its values, and called for the forging of links between the two countries.<sup>103</sup> The timing of this was favourable in an important sense- it followed Clinton's re-election in 1996, so the political risk of being accused of being 'soft' on Iran was lessened, given that he no longer had to consider the effect on a re-election campaign. This may also have been influenced by personnel changes in the US government, with Madeleine Albright replacing Warren Christopher as Secretary of State in January of 1997. Christopher had been Deputy Secretary of State under President Carter, serving through the hostage crisis that did so much to poison US-Iranian relations. Some sources argue that his experiences in this position inculcated an implacable hostility to the Islamic Republic which coloured the formation and execution of American policy.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Albright, *Madam Secretary*, p.319

<sup>103</sup> Mohammed Khatami, 'Transcript of an interview with Iranian President Mohammed Khatami', January 7 1998, <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html> accessed 01-10-10

<sup>104</sup> Gerges, *American and Political Islam*, p.124-6; Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.213; Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, p.136

The first overtures from the US to Iran quickly followed Khatami's election, and took the form of a series of letters sent to Iran via third parties over a series of months beginning in June, proposing direct talks by authorised representatives of both governments. The US also dropped its opposition to the construction of a gas pipeline for Central Asian natural gas through Iran, and placed the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MeK), the opposition group perhaps most feared and hated by the Iranian government, on the State Department's list of proscribed terrorist organisations, forbidding it from raising funds in the US.<sup>105</sup> This, in turn, was followed by some encouraging rhetoric from Khatami, culminating in his appearance on CNN.<sup>106</sup> The next two years would see a cautious series of gestures, each individually small, by the US. For instance, shortly after Khatami's statements on CNN, Clinton broadcast a goodwill message to Iran to mark the Iranian new year, which was re-played on Iranian state radio, and American officials also ceased to openly accuse Iran of complicity in the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia, which had killed several American servicemen.<sup>107</sup> The State Department's annual report on terrorism worldwide accused Iran of being the single-biggest state sponsor in 1997, though by 1999 this was judged to have changed.<sup>108</sup>

A delicate diplomatic dance also began at the United Nations, where both Iran and the US were members of the '6+2 Group', which periodically convened to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. At the first meeting of the group attended by Madeleine Albright in 1998, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kharrazi, avoided meeting her by sending his deputy, on the orders of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.<sup>109</sup> However, he did respond to American overtures in a speech to the Asia Society, and both Albright and Kharrazi did meet in person at a later 6+2 meeting in 2000.<sup>110</sup> More explicit American attempts to begin the

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<sup>105</sup> Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, p.106

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p.107

<sup>107</sup> Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.233

<sup>108</sup> Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, p.111

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p.110

<sup>110</sup> Albright & Woodward, *Madam Secretary*, p.323-5

reconciliation process with Iran had begun shortly before, in an address by Albright to the Asia Society in New York in June of 1998, in which she called for the rebuilding of ties between the US and Iran, leading to eventual normalisation of diplomatic relations. Her comments were echoed by President Clinton the next day, in remarks which Hiro argue “buried Clinton’s own...”dual containment” policy”.<sup>111</sup> More followed in January of 1999, when Albright stated that Iran was too important to be isolated, effectively pronouncing the containment of Iran as “officially dead.”<sup>112</sup> President Clinton followed up in April, issuing a veiled apology for the 1953 CIA-backed coup, and then signed an executive order allowing the export of food and medical supplies to Iran.<sup>113</sup> Finally, in March 2000, Albright made a more explicit apology for American involvement in the 1953 coup, offered to help with the unfreezing of Iranian assets in the US,<sup>114</sup> and announced the lifting of import restrictions of some Iranian goods (pistachios, carpets, caviar and dried fruit) into the US.<sup>115</sup>

Despite these attempts by the US to re-establish something akin to a publically-acknowledged dialogue with Iran, no breakthrough was made and the relationship between the two states remained adversarial. There are many obvious reasons for this, including the fact the US and Iran simply didn’t see eye-to-eye on a number of important issues, such as the presence of the US military in the Persian Gulf and Iran’s close relationship with Lebanese Hezbollah. It also reflected the fact that the relationship between the two states had a huge amount of ground to cover before it could reach anything like ‘normality,’ most significantly the bad blood between the two states stemming from events such as the hostage crisis. As described above, the American government was divided on the issue: despite its rhetoric the executive branch was lukewarm in its commitment to pursue the ‘containment’ of Iran aggressively and unilaterally, never imposing sanctions under ILSA, while forces within the legislature were determined to push the administration into turning the

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<sup>111</sup> Hiro, *Iran Today*, p.271

<sup>112</sup> Murray, *Foreign Policy and Iran*, p.111

<sup>113</sup> Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends*, p.244

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p.257

<sup>115</sup> Albright & Woodward, *Madam Secretary*, p.324

screws on Iran. This was mirrored on the Iranian side. Many sources attest to the fact the Khatami was reluctant to push too far and too fast to break through what he called the “bulky wall of mistrust”<sup>116</sup> between the US and Iran, and run the risk of deepening the rifts between reformers and conservatives in Iranian government and society to a dangerous degree. Consequently, in general he was able to make some gestures to signal his intentions to the US,<sup>117</sup> but unable to follow through. This also, like the American case, illuminates some facets of the Iranian political system, with the President in both countries required to reconcile his policies with those of other powerful political actors and institutions. This is more apparent in Iran, where the office of President is subordinate to that of the Supreme Leader. This led Khatami to declare in 2000 that he lacked the power to carry out his constitutional responsibilities, after a series of gruelling confrontations with his political opponents.<sup>118</sup> Ansari concurs with this assessment, stating that “neither President possessed sufficient authority to transcend their critics at home.”<sup>119</sup> The importance of the domestic aspect of US politics is discussed more fully in chapters 7 and 8.

## 5.4 Conclusions

Overall, we can draw several lessons from the features of ‘dual containment’ examined in this chapter. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, the use of the term ‘dual’ is in some ways a misnomer, and does not accurately reflect the true relationship between American policy towards Iraq on the one hand and Iran on the other. While the two states border each other, and both were the target of sanctions, the differences between the two states and the respective sanctions regimes were glaring, as was the American approach to maintaining them and the ultimate rationale for doing so. While the US sought the ‘containment’ of both states, in effect it pursued two separate policies

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<sup>116</sup> Khatami, CNN interview

<sup>117</sup> Such as clamping down on sanctions-busting trade with Iraq, ruling out official Iranian action against Salman Rushdie, and ending opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process. Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies*, p.186

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, p.114

<sup>119</sup> Ali Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Policy and the Roots of Mistrust* (London: Hurst & Co, 2006), p.178.

simultaneously, a fact that became more obvious as, in his second term, Clinton sought to mend fences with Iran while Washington's attitude towards Saddam Hussein's Iraq remained consistently hostile. This was recognised by some officials: as stated, Edward Djerejian attempted to prevent the term 'dual containment' from being used in the first place. He would later go so far as to describe it as "a rhetorical flourish that did more to confuse United States Middle East policy than serve realistically our national security interests" in light of the differences between Iran and Iraq.<sup>120</sup> The consequence of this decision, to pursue a process of containment of both states, was the assumption by the US of a quasi-hegemonic role in the management of Persian Gulf security. The breakdown of the tripolar system described in chapter 4, and the longstanding American policy of preventing the domination of the region by any state it considered hostile, as described in chapter 3, made the US the predominant actor in Persian Gulf security, but had the unintended side-effect of making American domestic politics major factors in the functioning of the Persian Gulf's security system.

Secondly, the nature of the policymaking process was different in each case. In the case of Iran the White House was forced to deal with a great deal of legislative activism, and, as we saw, Congress seized the initiative on more than one occasion, and succeeded in particular in severing the economic relationship between the US and Iran near-totally. Through ILSA, the legislative branch also threatened to damage US relations with its traditional allies and the administration's attempts to promote global free trade. Though the White House's appetite for confrontation with Iran was limited, relations nevertheless reached a true nadir under Clinton, so much so that Gerges argues the US "waged an undeclared economic, political, and covert war against Iran's cleric-dominated regime."<sup>121</sup> In contrast, relations with Saddam Hussein's Iraq remained consistently hostile at the highest levels, and the only real opposition to this stemmed from a groundswell of public sympathy for the suffering of the Iraqi people amongst Western publics. However, it must be acknowledged that

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<sup>120</sup> Correspondence with author

<sup>121</sup> Gerges, *America and Political Islam*, p.115

even in the Iraqi case Congress found a way to ‘raise the stakes’ by passing the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998.

The reasons for Congressional intervention in American Persian Gulf policy (and the theoretical implications of this), through legislations and other means, are the subject of the following chapters. In particular, they shall attempt to demonstrate why dual containment can best be understood as an example of neoclassical realism in action. It has been argued that while the US pursued the neutralisation of Iraqi and Iranian power in the Persian Gulf through various means from a ‘traditional’ geostrategic rationale, the means themselves were determined by other factors bound up in the nature of the American political system, the nature of the relationships between the US and Israel and the US and Iran, and domestic American politics. It is to these that we now turn our attention.

## **CHAPTER 6 Perception as an intervening variable: A triumphant America and a villainous Iran**

“Wherever you look, you will find the evil hand of Iran in this region.” Warren Christopher, US Secretary of State, 1993-1997<sup>1</sup>

As discussed in chapter 2, many adherents of NCR argue that an understanding of the perceptions of threat and power held by policymakers is a critical component that goes far in determining a state’s foreign policy. As the previous chapter discussed the details of American dual containment policy, we are now in a position to examine the role of perceptions in forming and shaping the policy. This chapter therefore examines the role of the perceptions of power and threat on the part of key American policymakers. It argues that Iran was perceived as a threat to American interests thanks to the legacy of mistrust between the two states, stemming back to 1979, and sharpened acutely by the American commitment to Israeli security and the Arab-Israeli peace process. Iraq under Saddam Hussein, on the other hand, was seen as a threat to American interests thanks to the aggressive wars waged in the previous decade. Perceptions of American power in the wake of the Cold War also played an important role, given the absence of superpower competition.

This chapter examines the evolution and nature of the perception of the threat posed by Iran in some detail as it is a more puzzling and more complex case than that of Iraq, and can be traced to the history of the interactions between the two states and the image of Iran in the minds of Americans, rather than primarily to Iran’s behaviour in the Persian Gulf (as in the case of Iraq). As a necessary corollary, it also examines the debate about the threat posed by ‘radical Islam’ in the US in the wake of the Cold War (given the link between Iran, radical Islamic forces, and terrorism perceived by American policymakers, as postulated by Gerges, amongst others).<sup>2</sup> This chapter begins with a short

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Elaine Sciolino, ‘Condemning Iranian Oil Deal, US May Tighten Trade Ban,’ *The New York Times*, 10 March 1995

<sup>2</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999)



discussion of how perceptions have been analysed by other scholars working within NCR, particularly some of the more recent scholarship that follows on from the 'third wave' works discussed in chapter 2. This is followed by a section each on the role of perceptions of power and threat on the part of American policymakers, and a section on the impact of the Iranian Hostage Crisis and the Iran-Contra scandal on the latter. The role of American perceptions of political Islam is then discussed, as is the impact of the Arab-Israeli peace process in the 1990s.

## 6.1 Perception and neoclassical realism

Perception is a key variable in many theories of neoclassical realism, and several scholars emphasise its role in the formation of foreign policy in their work. As stated, within the existing literature of neoclassical realism, perception as an intervening variable tends to be broken down in two ways: perceptions of threat, and perceptions of relative power. Rose traces this to the 'third wave' of works in NCR, with the first and second 'waves' focusing on shifts in the relative power of different states,<sup>3</sup> and the 'third' and following wave moving more towards studies of the interactions of shifts in power and perceptions of power and threat.<sup>4</sup> Regarding the former, Wohlforth, for instance (as seen in Chapter 2), discusses the role of perceptions of relative power in Soviet foreign policymaking in the final stages of the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, he writes regarding the decline of Soviet power that: "perceived relative decline was a necessary condition for the adoption of perestroika and "new thinking" and decline was connected to the burdens imposed by the Soviet Union's international position."<sup>6</sup> Also influential are perceptions of 'state power' held by policymakers, namely their perceptions of their ability to mobilize resources to

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Aaron Friedberg's *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988)

<sup>4</sup> Gideon Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,' *World Politics*, 51 (1) 1998. For a comprehensive list, see: Amelia Hadfield-Amkhan, *British Foreign Policy, National Identity, and Neoclassical Realism* (Plymouth, Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), chapter 2, note 28

<sup>5</sup> William Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993)

<sup>6</sup> William Wohlforth, 'Realism and the End of the Cold War', *International Security*, 19 (3) (1994/1995), p.108.

carry out their objectives. In the same chapter, we saw that Zakaria holds that this factor was definitive in explaining why US foreign policy remained somewhat out of step with its growing economic power: it was only when presidents believed that they finally enjoyed the preponderance of power in the foreign policy-making process that they began to expand their conceptions of the 'national interest' and pursued more ambitious goals.<sup>7</sup>

The other major theme is that of the perception of threat on the part of policymakers. This conditions how they respond to threats and what threats they respond to, according to research by scholars of neoclassical realism. Schweller, like Wohlforth, argues that policymakers' perceptions of the international environment and the balance of power are an important explanatory variable, and goes some way towards explaining why states sometimes 'underbalance.'<sup>8</sup> This theme is further explored by Steven Lobell, who creates an intricate model of threat identification by elites within states across international, regional and domestic levels.<sup>9</sup> In other cases, it forms an important component in broader theories about the impact of the autonomy of FPEs on foreign policy, such as in Dueck's study of the variables affecting presidential decisions about military intervention abroad, and his assertion that "the US was forced to intervene in [Korea, Vietnam and Iraq] due to some intolerable external threat, but in fact the crucial immediate variable was the perception of it on the part of senior officials, and not the international system as such."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p.1

<sup>9</sup> Steven Lobell, 'Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model,' in Lobell, Ripsman, Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

<sup>10</sup> Colin Dueck, 'Neoclassical realism and the national interest: presidents, domestic politics, and major military interventions,' in Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman & Jeffrey Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.149-50

## 6.2 Perceptions of power and opportunity

Perceptions of relative power play a significant role in the formation of foreign policy, and ‘dual containment’ proved to be no exception to this rule. American policymakers stated at several points throughout the 1990s that the end of the Cold War and its superpower rivalry gave the US more latitude to pursue its objectives, and that the reconfiguration of global power structures resulting from the end of the Cold War required a new approach to international relations that recognised this fact.

As stated in Chapter 5, Martin Indyk’s announcement of ‘dual containment’ policy at the Soref Symposium in 1993 included the following point: “in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War, the United States stands as the dominant power in the region, uniquely capable of influencing the course of events.”<sup>11</sup> American policymakers therefore perceived that the US enjoyed a position of unchallenged global and regional pre-eminence. This is echoed in a statement from the following year, in an article attributed to National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, who states that “the end of the Cold War simply eliminated a major strategic consideration from our calculus. We no longer have to fear Soviet efforts to gain a foothold in the Persian Gulf by taking advantage of our support for one of these states to build relations with the other.”<sup>12</sup> The importance of this point should not be underestimated, given the pre-occupation of US policymakers with the Soviet threat during the previous 45 years. As we saw in Chapter 3, this led them to frequently view the Persian Gulf primarily as an arena in which the wider global struggle was fought out, when they did turn their attentions to the region. Numerous examples are on display in even the most cursory examination, such as facilitating Iran’s build-up of arms under the ‘Nixon Doctrine’ in the 1970s, the formation of the Rapid Deployment Force and the Carter Doctrine in 1980, and President Regan’s decision to ‘re-flag’ Kuwaiti oil tankers in order to pre-empt Soviet involvement during the Iran-

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Indyk, ‘The Clinton Administration’s Approach to the Middle East’, Soref Symposium, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 1993, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-clinton-administrations-approach-to-the-middle-east> accessed 08-07-2012

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Lake, ‘Confronting Backlash States,’ *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (2) 1994, p.48

Iraq War. The necessity of maintaining a substantial American presence in the Persian Gulf remained, however, given the long-standing American commitment to Israel, and the continued centrality of the Persian Gulf's oil and gas to the smooth running of the global economy.

Additionally, both Lake and Indyk highlighted the degradation of Iran and Iraq's military power following the 1980-1988 and 1991 wars, which enabled the US to pursue a parallel-track containment policy in the Persian Gulf. As Indyk put it in 1993, "we are fortunate to inherit a balance of power and a much reduced level of military capability to threaten our interests."<sup>13</sup> Together with the absence of a superpower competitor, this made the Persian Gulf a permissive environment for the US to exercise its power.

### **6.3 Perceptions of threat**

Examination of the perceptions of the threat posed by Iran and Iraq held by American policymakers reveals a complex mosaic of interlocking threat perceptions, all derived from interconnected sources. The first, and perhaps most obvious of these, is the perception of Iran and Iraq as threats to American geostrategic interests in the Persian Gulf. Chapter 3 examined how US policymakers came to view the Persian Gulf and its energy supplies as a critical element in Western security in the wake of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War, given the industrialized world's dependence on fossil fuels, especially oil. This dependence did not change appreciably with the collapse of the Soviet Union, meaning that any perceived threat to the export of oil and gas from this region remained synonymous with a threat to Western security as a whole, determining the persistence of US involvement in the Persian Gulf. Although the US had not depended on the Persian Gulf for the bulk of its oil imports, the integration of the global oil market ensures that it remains a key node in the global economy, which is in itself a key American security interest, as the interruption of the Gulf's oil exports would cause an immediate global oil price spike and serious economic disruption. From a more local perspective, the

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<sup>13</sup> Indyk, 'The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East'

final collapse of the regional tripolar security system with the 1991 Gulf War created a demand for the presence of an external security guarantor, the United States, given the on-going hostility between Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq, and the inability, unwillingness (or unacceptability to the Arab monarchies of the Gulf) of other states to fulfil this role.

When the Clinton administration entered office, it inherited the infrastructure and many of the preconceptions and preferences of the American foreign policy 'establishment' up to that point, and as discussed in the previous chapter chose to pursue a Persian Gulf policy that did not stray too far from the mainstream of previous American policy. It would therefore have been "remarkable" if the new administration had undertaken a wide-ranging realignment of Persian Gulf policy, especially considering the links that had been built up with the Gulf Arab states, including defence agreements.<sup>14</sup> An example of the possible political fallout from such a measure can be seen in the reaction to president-elect Bill Clinton's comment in a newspaper interview shortly before his first inauguration that he was a believer in 'death-bed conversions', and was willing to countenance the rehabilitation of Saddam Hussein if Iraq gave up its non-conventional weapons development programs and complied with UN sanctions. The negative reaction of much of the press and the American political class prompted Clinton to make a swift U-turn.<sup>15</sup>

The US therefore has consistently sought to prevent the domination of the Persian Gulf by an 'unfriendly' power, be it the Soviet Union in the Cold War (leading to the promulgation of the Carter Doctrine), or a hostile regional state like Iran or Iraq, which threatened to upset the regional status quo in a fashion that threatened American interests. As Mearsheimer and Walt argue, "America's main interest in the Middle East is oil, and protecting access to this commodity mainly depends on preventing any single country from controlling

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Bruce Riedel former CIA, Defense Department and National Security Council official, Washington, DC, February 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ambassador Chas Freeman, former ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Defense Department official, Washington, DC, February 2011; Martin Indyk, *Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East*, (New York City, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2009), p.31

the entire region.”<sup>16</sup> The centrality of this resource may also have had a high priority for the incoming administration because of its focus on globalisation and international trade. This therefore defined the targets of ‘dual containment’: Iran and Iraq, which possess the latent power resources to attempt to establish hegemony over the Persian Gulf, as described in chapter 4. This led, amongst other things, to the ‘tilt’ towards Iraq and against Iran during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and the decision to reverse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990-91: the US was determined to prevent either Iran or Iraq from developing the means to amass sufficient influence to dictate the policies of other Persian Gulf states. Iraq is a more straightforward case: under Saddam Hussein, it was widely seen as a dangerous and opportunistic regime that relied upon poorly-conceived military adventurism to build up its regional power and influence, invading first Iran and then Kuwait. Its use of conventional military forces in an aggressive way seemed to place it beyond the pale of diplomatic engagement, and required coercive measures to keep it in check.

The Iranian case is more troublesome: Iran has not invaded any other state (the historical record is, arguably, one of a state more sinned against than sinning: the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement, the allied invasion in the Second World War, the Soviet occupation of Azerbaijan, ‘Operation Ajax’ and the 1953 coup), yet was perceived as a threat nonetheless requiring of ‘containment.’ Iran is the largest state in the Persian Gulf region, as detailed in chapter 4, and therefore poses a ‘latent’ threat to American domination of the security system of the Gulf. As detailed in chapter 5, the US has subsequently sought to choke off Iran’s access to technology and military equipment (except, like in the Iran-Contra affair, when it has supplied Iran with weapons for its own purposes), for example by buying up military hardware to prevent it falling into Iranian hands. In addition, Washington pressured Russia and China (two of Iran’s major suppliers) not to sell it military equipment, to prevent it from building up the kind of military power enjoyed by Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, or achieve the Shah’s ambitions of regional domination, however unfeasible this may be in reality. It also formed a part of the decision not to actively support the 1991 uprising

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<sup>16</sup> John Mearsheimer & Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (NY; Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007), p.142. See also p.141-2 and p.281.

against Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party in 1991, out of fear that Iran would emerge as the main beneficiary and enhance its regional influence.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, it would also emerge as one of the key reasons for the eagerness of the US to re-establish ties to Iran, a feature of the contemporary US-Iranian relationship that recurs periodically. Iran is too good an opportunity to miss: it is strategically placed and rich in hydrocarbons, and it was a valuable ally before 1979. The two states also shared a common enemy in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Overall, the antagonistic relationship between the US and Iran is a problem for both parties, one too large to ignore, but is not one that can be easily or quickly solved. In other words, "The United States would certainly welcome strategic changes that would bring it closer to a millennium-old civilisation: a huge market, and educated population and a geographically appealing location."<sup>18</sup>

While Adib-Moghaddam's claim that "Together with their allies in the Likud party in Israel...[a] neoconservative coterie has manufactured an image of Iran, which has made the country's 'aggressive nature' an established fact amongst influential strata of international society"<sup>19</sup> is an exaggeration, it is clear that the antagonistic relationship between the US and Iran is deeply rooted and persistent, and based in part on a strikingly negative perception of Iran on the part of many Americans. An important element in this perception is the history of antagonism between the US and Iran. Since the 1979 revolution and the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the two states have been at odds over, for one, the role of the US in the regional security system, and the US has consistently sought to marginalise and reduce Iran's regional influence (despite occasional attempts to persuade its leaders to be more accommodating, such as the Iran-Contra affair, and President Bush's (1988-1991) overture. This perception is also complicated (if not intensified) by the Islamic character of the revolution, which puzzled the Carter administration officials who were the first

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<sup>17</sup> F. Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.118.

<sup>18</sup> Matteo Legrenzi, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf: Diplomacy, Security and Economic Cooperation in a Changing Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2011), p.129.

<sup>19</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic* (London, Hurst & Co., 2007), p.125.

to be tasked with dealing with it,<sup>20</sup> and coloured much of the thinking of officials towards Islamist movements in the Middle East, with which the US has had, at best, an ambiguous attitude towards. Within the US, the rise of political Islam in the Middle East has been characterised as a threat, albeit one that has not been fully understood, or thoroughly conceptualised. Instead, it is seen as a potentially-dangerous ‘other’, a hostile force that endangers American interests by threatening the survival of existing pro-American governments. In this sense, the Iranian revolution served as the template for the generalised, more-or-less diffuse antipathy towards political Islam that has marked American policy towards this phenomenon since 1979. As Fuller and Lesser argue, “Despite the awareness, certainly in expert circles, that Islam is hardly monolithic and that Islamic politics can take varied forms, there remains – especially in the United States – a concern that the Iranian model is more likely to be the norm rather than the exception where Islamic regimes come to power.”<sup>21</sup> This has perhaps been exacerbated by the natural human tendency to see patterns and connections where they may not necessarily exist, or draw unjustified and fallacious historical parallels based on superficial resemblances. In Moussali’s words, “Under the influence of the Islamic revolution Islamism replaced secular nationalism as a security threat to US interests, and fear of a clash between Islam and the West crystallized in the minds of many Americans.”<sup>22</sup> This also stems from the fact that the revolution that overthrew the Shah came very much as a shock to US policymakers, and became widely perceived as an enormous strategic reverse that endangered the American position in the Persian Gulf, and rendered its previous preferred policy of relying on proxies obsolete.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Gary Sick, *All Fall Down*, p.192-7

<sup>21</sup> Graham Fuller & Ian Lesser, *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press/RAND, 1995), p.22

<sup>22</sup> Ahmad Moussali, *US Foreign Policy and Islamist Politics* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), p.17.

<sup>23</sup> Gerjes, *American and Political Islam*, p.43-4.



## 6.4 The hostage crisis and Iran-Contra

The hostage crisis played a significant role in institutionalising a degree of hostility into American policy towards Iran, both at the elite and the popular level, and is cited by many scholars as a ‘watershed’ moment that entrenched the issue of bilateral relations into the respective politics of each state. Writing in the late 1980s, James Bill stated that the hostage crisis “left a legacy of distrust, misunderstanding, and hatred that will plague Iranian-American relations for years.”<sup>24</sup> Marr also argues that the effect of the hostage crisis was strong and enduring, stating that it “poisoned” US-Iranian relations.<sup>25</sup> This is echoed by Henrikson, who argues that “it marked *the* turning point in American-Iranian relations. It constituted a watershed demarcation that to this day afflicts the policies of both nations.”<sup>26</sup> For others, it is the ‘original sin,’ the event that ensured Iran’s relationship with the US would be qualitatively different, on the American side, from all the other ‘rogue states.’<sup>27</sup> At the same time, it represents something of a problem for the scholar seeking to get to the bottom of its effects on American foreign policy, as its impacts, while widely-held to be substantial, are relatively difficult to quantify, given that they primarily impacted on individuals’ perceptions and feelings towards Iran. As Gary Sick observed, “not very much happened. The hostages were taken, held for fourteen and a half months and then released...for the most part it was political shadowboxing, more form than substance.”<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, there are a certain number of significant effects that a wide range of scholars argue have had an enduring effect on relations between Iran and the US.

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<sup>24</sup> James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p.302

<sup>25</sup> Phebe Marr, ‘US Strategy towards the Persian Gulf: From Rogue States to Failed States’. In Markus Kaim (ed.), *Great Powers and Regional Orders: The United States and the Persian Gulf* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008), p.14.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Henrikson, *America and the Rogue States* (New York, NY: PalgraveMacmillan, 2012), p.72.

<sup>27</sup> James Blight, Janet Lang, Hussein Banai, Malcolm Byrne, and John Tirman, *Becoming Enemies: US-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988* (New York, NY: Rowan & Littlefield, 2012)

<sup>28</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, p.259

Although the original seizure of the US embassy in Tehran was carried out by student protestors with a variety of motivations, including anger at the admission of the Shah into the US for medical treatment and fear of another 1953-style coup, their actions were subsequently endorsed and co-opted by the new revolutionary government (after some factional division), which held several dozen embassy staff hostage in Iran for 444 days. The failure of a military rescue mission and the deaths of eight American military personnel in the collision between a helicopter and refuelling plane was an additional blow that deepened the sense of powerlessness and humiliation engendered by the hostage-taking itself. Many scholars argue that the fact that the whole episode was carried on in the public gaze, and given exhaustive coverage<sup>29</sup> (especially by American TV networks) in the world's media was an additional factor, increasing the pressure on the American government and helping fuel public outrage over the issue of the hostages, which became "an overwhelming national obsession."<sup>30</sup> According to some accounts, it received the most media coverage of any single event since the Second World War.<sup>31</sup> The crisis dragged on for over a year, unlike many other crises which flare up and are quickly forgotten by the public, leading to the forging of an enduring negative image of Iran in the minds of Americans, and became, according to many, a deciding factor in the 1980 election, giving it an added importance for American political elites. Sick also argues that this was exacerbated by the fact that "Americans knew little about [Iran], cared less, and – despite the massive television exposure and the spilling of millions of gallons of printer's ink – managed to emerge from the ordeal with their basic ignorance surprisingly intact."<sup>32</sup> Afterwards, as far as Americans in general 'knew' anything about Iran, it tended to be highly negative. It was therefore an experience "that burned itself into the popular imagination and became part of the political landscape."<sup>33</sup> Pollack, in his study of US-Iranian relations, is explicit in his claim that it had an enormous impact, arguing that

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<sup>29</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, p.296

<sup>30</sup> Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.363

<sup>31</sup> Henrikson, *America and the Rogue States*, p.72

<sup>32</sup> Sick, *All Fall Down*, p.258

<sup>33</sup> Ali Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Roots of Mistrust* (London: Hurst & Co., 2006), p.93

“The hostage crisis has left a terrible scar on the American psyche...few Americans have ever forgiven the Iranians for it. It is America’s great underlying grievance against Iran...We never discuss it openly, but the residual anger that so many Americans feel toward Iran for those 444 days has colored every decision made about Iran ever since.”<sup>34</sup>

In the short term, the seizure of the embassy and its staff marked a decisive break in US-Iranian relations, with the severance of diplomatic relations between the two states, the imposition of sanctions and an economic embargo, and the freezing of Iranian assets in the US after a short period of confused and fruitless negotiations between the two states over the hostages.<sup>35</sup> Prior to this event, the US had attempted to reach out to ‘moderates’ in the new Iranian government, but this was frustrated by the hostage crisis and the consolidation of power in Iran by more anti-American factions.<sup>36</sup> In the long term, it appears to have created a deep reservoir of bitter animosity and vitriol that has never fully dissipated, giving factions hostile to US-Iranian rapprochement on both sides a resource to draw upon when needed. It therefore did much to set the tone of subsequent interaction between the US and Iran. Diplomatic relations were not re-established and the economic sanctions would only multiply with time, especially after Iran was designated a sponsor of terrorism by the Reagan administration in 1984.<sup>37</sup> Afterwards, both the US and Iran consistently demonized each other in official discourse, and were to some degree mutually uncomprehending of each other’s motives and outlook, something which failed to improve, thanks in part to the absence of diplomatic relations between them. Overall, “the Islamic revolution in Iran and the hostage crisis had a devastatingly negative impact on Americans’ perceptions of Islam and Muslims in general.”<sup>38</sup> It cemented an enduring suspicion amongst some Americans that Iran as a

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<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York, NY: Random House, 2004), p.172

<sup>35</sup> Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980) p.330

<sup>36</sup> Babak Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation: The Foreign Policy of the USA and Revolutionary Iran* (London: IB Tauris, 2006), p.5

<sup>37</sup> Blight et al, *Becoming Enemies*, Appendix I

<sup>38</sup> Gerjes, *America and Political Islam*, p.68

fundamentally ‘rogue’ state, in that it is essentially anti-American, and radical in that it refuses to acknowledge the niceties of diplomatic protocol and international law, and is therefore untrustworthy and unable to be negotiated with rationally, and can only be dealt with coercively, from a position of strength. In Ansari’s words, “there is no point negotiating with an irrational interlocutor.”<sup>39</sup> Consequently, in “official Washington, the Iranians are theocratic, cruel, determined to develop a nuclear weapons capability to increase their capacity to blackmail their many enemies in the region and the West, and to threaten the very existence of Israel.”<sup>40</sup>

The repercussions of the hostage crisis were reinforced by the Iran-Contra affair, which also injected another degree of caution and hesitance into the institutional memory of the US foreign policy apparatus regarding attempts to reconcile with Iran.<sup>41</sup> Ansari, for one, argues that, following President Carter’s misfortunes, Reagan’s troubles transformed animosity towards Iran into a “bipartisan affair that ruptured the intimate relationship between the elites [of the US and Iran].” Iran subsequently “transcended regular politics and became a myth, part of political folklore.”<sup>42</sup> Hunter concurs with this assessment, and argues that “it hardened the US position toward Iran, and discredited any idea of reconciliation, until and unless Iran’s regime was changed or at least its behaviour was altered to such a degree that, in effect, transformed the character of the regime.”<sup>43</sup>

The strength of the legacy of the hostage crisis and the Iran-Contra scandal can be seen in the nature of the subsequent interactions between the two governments at the elite level, which were carried out via intermediaries and through public messages in the media that were easy to ignore or misunderstand

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<sup>39</sup> Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, p.82

<sup>40</sup> Blight et al, *Becoming Enemies*, ‘Prologue’

<sup>41</sup> “[Iran-Contra] was still fresh in people’s minds [in the Clinton administration]...everyone remembers it, no-one wants to get burned again.” Kenneth Pollack, former CIA and NSC official, interview with author Washington DC, March 2012

<sup>42</sup> Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, p.72-3 & p.112

<sup>43</sup> Shireen Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), p.42

because of their vague nature. For instance, in 1989, the US government hinted that it might be willing to re-consider re-opening the question of Iranian assets frozen in the US if Iran provided assistance with American hostages in Lebanon, but denied that any 'deal' was on offer. Iran responded by suggesting that its assistance could be gained if some Iranian assets, frozen in the US after the 1979 revolution and the hostage crisis, were returned.<sup>44</sup> Although two of the hostages were released, reportedly thanks to Rafsanjani's intervention with the kidnappers, the US did not reciprocate in the way that Iran desired.<sup>45</sup> An intermediary, the Italian diplomat and UN hostage negotiator Giandomenico Picco, who broke this news to Iran's then-president Rafsanjani, was apparently warned to leave Iran for his own safety after delivering the bad news.<sup>46</sup> Despite his assertion in his inaugural address that "goodwill begets goodwill," President Bush seems to have been either unable or unwilling to take more decisive steps towards improving relations with Iran. This mistrust was also visible in the decision not to invite Iran to the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991. According to Dennis Ross, the American diplomat who played a key role in attempting to mediate in the Arab-Israeli peace process, Rafsanjani's overtures to Bush regarding a willingness to compromise on Israel were dismissed thanks what seems to have been a case of 'selection bias', in which evidence that contradicts existing beliefs (in this case, that Iran was implacably hostile and untrustworthy) is dismissed, while evidence that supports it is not.<sup>47</sup>

## 6.5 Iran and Political Islam: the new Communism?

The most charged aspect of the vitriol expressed between Iran, Iraq, the US, and other 'rogue states' in the Middle East has been the sectarian, religious dimension, with some figures on both sides of the divide alleging that the other is engaged on a religious crusade or jihad. Given the incendiary nature of this kind

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<sup>44</sup> For instance, see Maureen Dowd, 'Iran is reportedly ready for a deal to recover assets,' *The New York Times*, August 9, 1989.

<sup>45</sup> Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy*, p.163

<sup>46</sup> Giandomenico Picco, *Man Without a Gun* (New York, NY: Times Books, 1999), p.5-6; Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, p.49;

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p.152

of accusation, and the prominence of it in the 1990s (for example, the great attention given to Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis),<sup>48</sup> it is necessary to examine the degree to which this formed a part of American perceptions of the threat from Iran and other Islamist states and groups, and how far this impacted upon policymaking, as well as other ideological clashes between the US and its enemies.

### **6.5.1 Accommodationists vs. confrontationalists**

Following the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the events of the 1980s, American attitudes to political Islam can be divided into two broad strands, defined by Gerges as 'confrontationalist' and 'accommodationist.'<sup>49</sup> These are useful terms, and valuable in attempting to understand the debates surrounding American foreign policy, as long as the fact that they are ideal types rather than empirical categories is borne in mind. Both of these strands were on display with regards to Iran and different movements in the 1990s. The 'confrontationalist' strand has been most visible in some quarters of the media and in Congress. With regards to Iran specifically, Beeman sums up this situation as one in which "Iran continues to be demonized and despised in legislative halls – and the Mad Mullah image provides an overly facile, dismissive argument to anyone in government who suggests that meaningful negotiations with Iran on matters of mutual interest might be pursued."<sup>50</sup>

Gerges separates this camp from specific worries about the impact of the rise of political Islam as a political phenomenon would have on American foreign policy in the Middle East, and argues that it, in contrast, is predicated on the idea that democracy and Islam are incompatible, and that for some it is also inherently violent. He argues that Huntington's (in)famous 'clash of civilisations' thesis falls into this camp, given his claim that "Islam has bloody borders."<sup>51</sup> The idea of the 'clash of civilisations' is in turn borrowed from

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<sup>48</sup> Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilisations?' *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (3) 1993, pp.22-49

<sup>49</sup> The terms are introduced and defined in chapter 2 of Gerges, *America and Political Islam*

<sup>50</sup> William Beeman, *The "Great Satan" vs. the "Mad Mullahs": How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), p.86

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilisations?' p.35.

Bernard Lewis, who Gerges argues is also a ‘confrontationalist.’<sup>52</sup> Some, such as journalist, commentator and pundit Charles Krauthammer, specifically identify the Islamic Republic of Iran as a malevolent force responsible for some of political Islam’s most troublesome manifestations, accusing it of being “implacably hostile to Western liberalism” and determined to seize control of the Persian Gulf and destroy Israel out of religious conviction.<sup>53</sup> The view of ‘confrontationalists’ was strongly linked with the belief that political Islam represented the next ‘great enemy’ after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, a ‘Green Menace’ in the place of the ‘Red Menace.’ Krauthammer, for one, explicitly made this link, arguing that “Iran is the center of the world’s new Comintern”, and that “As with Soviet communism, this new messianic creed must be contained.”<sup>54</sup>

‘Accommodationists’, on the other hand, repudiated this reasoning, and denied that there was a monolithic ‘Islam’ that was inimical to the US and democracy, and that it therefore was not the next ‘great threat’ that the US had to confront now that international communism had vanished. Many also advocated a policy of ‘benign neglect’ with regards to the growth of Islamism in states with strong ties to the US, such as Egypt, or promotion of civil society and democratic norms and practices as the antidote to extremism and radicalisation.<sup>55</sup> Leon Hadar, for instance, advocated an American policy of ‘constructive disengagement’, in which the US would seek a much more low-key involvement in the Middle East, and downgrade its ties to repressive allies.<sup>56</sup> Some also highlighted the incentives that existed for some foreign governments to play up the dangers of a ‘Green Peril’ in order to win American support, in a similar tactic to that of “the way Third World countries exploited the US obsession with the Red Menace during the Cold War despite their own scepticism about its long-term threat.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Bernard Lewis, ‘The Roots of Muslim Rage’, *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Krauthammer, ‘Iran: Orchestra of Disorder’, *Washington Post*, 1 January 1993

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> For instance, see Ghassan Salame, ‘Islam and the West’, *Foreign Policy*, no.90, 1993, p.22-37.

<sup>56</sup> Leon Hadar, ‘What Green Peril?’, *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (2) 1993, p.40-42

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.30

The contention between these two viewpoints has been complicated by the division of power in the American political system (which will be discussed further in chapter 7), which allows for different power centres in the US government to hold different threat perceptions and different strategic and tactical preferences, over and above bureaucratic wrangling over tactics or the definition of national interests (such as a ministry of trade promoting trade with a state defined as a threat by the ministry of defence). As stated above, the ‘confrontationalist’ strand has been most apparent in the legislative branch of the US government, while the executive branch, including the State Department, adopted “the symbols and terminology of accommodationists to delineate their stance on political Islam.”<sup>58</sup> This was also true of the Bush (1988-1992) and Clinton administration’s official rhetoric.<sup>59</sup> The most significant example was the ‘Meridian House address’, delivered by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asian Affairs Edward Djerejian in June of 1992, which has subsequently come to be regarded as the closest thing to an ‘official’ policy on political Islam.<sup>60</sup> Originally entitled ‘The US and the Middle East in Changing World,’ it outlined two major policy goals: progress towards a negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli peace process (which became especially important in the subsequent Clinton administration) and unimpeded commercial access to the region’s oil reserves (which we dealt with above). In addition, it stated that “the US Government does not view Islam as the next “ism” confronting the West or threatening world peace...the Cold War is not being replaced with a new competition between Islam and the West.”<sup>61</sup>

Subsequent statements by President Clinton and his officials re-affirmed the same reasoning and policy. In the same speech in which he announced the

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<sup>58</sup> Gerges, *America and Political Islam*, p.35

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.35-6

<sup>60</sup> Edward Djerejian, *Danger and Opportunity: An American Ambassador’s Journey Through The Middle East* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2008), p.20

<sup>61</sup> A copy of the text is available at [http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=meridian%20house%20address%20djerejian&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CElQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.disam.dsca.mil%2Fpubs%2FVol%252014\\_4%2FDjerejian.pdf&ei=SDz0T4ysHqjL0QWPuLCjBw&usg=AFQjCNFzHjbfXlgwsSBSaA2rfRwWRYaXA](http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=meridian%20house%20address%20djerejian&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CElQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.disam.dsca.mil%2Fpubs%2FVol%252014_4%2FDjerejian.pdf&ei=SDz0T4ysHqjL0QWPuLCjBw&usg=AFQjCNFzHjbfXlgwsSBSaA2rfRwWRYaXA), accessed 04-07-2012.



administration's 'dual containment' policy, at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's (WINEP) 'Soref Symposium' in 1993, Martin Indyk (then serving on the National Security Council), stated that despite its decision to confront the threat posed by Iran, this did not reflect an American objection to the Islamic nature of its government, but instead its authoritarianism and the specific direction of its foreign policies.<sup>62</sup> President Clinton himself used the opportunity afforded by a visit to Jordan in 1994 on the eve of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty to declare that "America refuses to accept that our civilisations must collide. We respect Islam." He also used the same speech to denounce terrorism and opponents of the peace process.<sup>63</sup> In an article the same year in *Foreign Affairs* designed to codify the administration's foreign policy and demonstrate a cohesive strategic doctrine,<sup>64</sup> National Security Advisor Anthony Lake reiterated the essentially secular drives of American policy, and claimed that "the Clinton administration does not oppose Islamic government."<sup>65</sup>

Nonetheless, a reluctance to deal with the consequences of the entry of Islamist forces is detectable in American policy of the period elsewhere in the Middle East, though there is little evidence of a single coherent and consistent policy towards the phenomenon as a whole. The picture was sharpened by the fact that three of the 'backlash' or 'rogue' states, Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan, were located in the Middle East, and ostensibly Islamic in Iraq and Libya's case, and explicitly so in the case of Iran and Sudan. For some critics, this created the appearance that the label of 'rogue state' was used by the US "as a politically convenient device to cast Islamic states pursuing policies contrary to US interests as the new post-Cold War threat."<sup>66</sup> The reality was more complex. Egypt and Algeria, for instance, proved to be illustrative examples.<sup>67</sup> In Algeria, the US

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<sup>62</sup> Indyk, 'The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East'

<sup>63</sup> William J. Clinton, 'Remarks to the Jordanian Parliament in Amman, Jordan', October 26, 1994, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=49373> accessed 27-01-2013

<sup>64</sup> Author's interview with Hillary Mann Leverett, former State Department and National Security Council Official, Washington, D.C., February 2011

<sup>65</sup> Anthony Lake, 'Confronting Backlash States,' *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (2) 1994, p.50

<sup>66</sup> Robert Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy: Containment After the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) p.8

<sup>67</sup> Gerges provides useful case studies of the American relationship with these two states in the first half of the 1990s in chapters 7 and 8 of *America and Political Islam*

was pragmatic, establishing initial contacts with the Islamists, in the form of the FIS, but severed its links as the country descended into its devastating civil war, and in Egypt it ensured that contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood remained very low-key at the insistence of Mubarak's government,<sup>68</sup> for whom the organization would remain anathema until the fall of the regime in 2011. This strongly suggests that the underlying reason was a preference for the status quo, which favoured American interests, over the unpredictable forces arising from widespread social and political upheaval, which might lead to a replay of the Iranian scenario. As noted above, American allies in the Middle East, such as the regime of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, were also careful to promote a 'confrontationalist' narrative, emphasising the radical religious nature of their opponents in the hope of winning US support.

A lack of sectarian prejudice is also visible in American foreign policy in the US's dealings with the Taliban in Afghanistan in the 1990s, to which the State Department extended a "cautious welcome," puzzling Iranian officials, in a bid to both contain Iran's regional influence and advance American plans to link Central and South Asia with energy pipelines. In Ansari's words, "It took a while for the consequences of this move to be understood by Iranian officials, but the message was ultimately clear. Radical Islam was *not* the problem."<sup>69</sup> This followed on the heels of American support for some of the Taliban's predecessors amongst the *mujahedin* battling the Soviet Union in the 1980s, which has been discussed extensively elsewhere. All in all, the overall picture is one of pragmatism, caution and reserve, instilled perhaps by the experience of the Iranian revolution.

### 6.5.2 Rebels against the new world order

There was also a more subtle ideological clash between the US and Iran, Iraq and other 'rogue states' in this era, based on what the US claimed to stand

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<sup>68</sup> Wikileaks cables also suggest that American diplomats were sceptical of the organisation's claims that it was committed to democracy. For instance, see cable no. 99CAIRO2104, 'Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood at Low Ebb', <http://wikileaks.org/cable/1999/03/99CAIRO2104.html> accessed 05-09-2012.

<sup>69</sup> Emphasis in original text Ansari, *Confronting*), p.146.

‘for’ rather than ‘against.’ As far as the Clinton administration can have been said to have a guiding principle in its foreign policy, it was a shift in emphasis away from ‘geopolitics’ and towards ‘geo-economics’, primarily the promotion of an interdependent, liberal global order based on free trade and globalised commerce.<sup>70</sup> In more strictly political terms, this went hand-in-hand with rhetorical commitments to ‘democratic expansion’ (influenced heavily by the democratic peace theory), in other words to necessity of enlarging the pool of democratic states in global politics.<sup>71</sup> President Clinton also seems to have strongly believed that the future of American prosperity and economic growth at home was closely tied up with enhancing American competitiveness in an increasingly ‘globalised’ world, or in other words that “the United States has to compete in world markets or go under”<sup>72</sup>. In Hunter’s words, ‘dual containment’ complemented “other aspects of the Clinton administration’s international strategy of promoting economic globalization and democracy, because the administration believed that their strategies would inevitably increase US economic and cultural influence.”<sup>73</sup> To further this agenda, Clinton made several changes to the American foreign policy apparatus, such as establishing a National Economic Council (NEC) in parallel with the existing National Security Council (NSC), and instructing the State Department to do more to promote American commerce abroad, to such an extent that “Trade is now as essential to American ambassadors as it has been for [US] allies for years.”<sup>74</sup> President Clinton also sought to enhance the role of the Department of Commerce after years as a bureaucratic backwater.<sup>75</sup> It also involved pushing hard for the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the passage through Congress of which became one of the central objectives of Clinton’s first term.

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<sup>70</sup> Ofira Seliktar, *Navigating Iran: From Carter to Obama* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), chapter 5

<sup>71</sup> Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy*, p.24-6

<sup>72</sup> Michael Cox, *US Foreign Policy After the Cold War: Superpower Without A Mission?* (London: Pinter, 1995), p.120

<sup>73</sup> Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, p.50

<sup>74</sup> Arthur Lowrie, ‘The Campaign Against Islam and American Foreign Policy,’ *Middle East Policy*, 4 (1-2), 1995, p.210

<sup>75</sup> Cox, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, p.17 and 32

To adherents in this vision within the Clinton administration, states like Iran represented authoritarian, atavistic throwbacks that refused to recognise that the world had changed and adapt, sought non-conventional weapons in part to insulate themselves from these forces, and therefore had to be side-lined to allow the advancement of this ‘new world order.’<sup>76</sup> This conflicted with American strategy in their regions, which was “democratic consolidation, market-led development and closer integration of the developing countries into the world market.”<sup>77</sup> In Lake’s terms, ‘rogue states’ had a “recalcitrant commitment to remain on the wrong side of history.”<sup>78</sup> In contrast to ‘rogue states,’ ‘good’ states accepted the need to promote “free markets, democratic expansion, and control of the spread of WMD.”<sup>79</sup> However, as Litwak and Fields point out, the Clinton administration pursued different policies towards each ‘rogue,’<sup>80</sup> negotiating with North Korea and ‘containing’ Iraq and Iran, which suggests that this typology was either largely a rhetorical label rather than a functional policy, or a pragmatic response to different circumstances in a more complex post-Cold War world.

### 6.5.3 Terrorism

As well as the trends identified above, perceptions of Iran as ‘the quintessential rogue state’ were formed in part by the association between Iran and Islamic terrorism in the minds of some Americans. Iran was first placed on the State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism in early 1984 because of its backing for Lebanese Hezbollah,<sup>81</sup> only a few months after the bombing of the US Marines barracks in Beirut. Aside from its backing for Hezbollah and ‘rejectionist’ Palestinian factions (discussed more fully below), all whom are considered terrorists by the US, a number of incidents in the Middle East and

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<sup>76</sup> Author interview with Kenneth Pollack, Washington DC, March 2012

<sup>77</sup> Cox, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, p.124

<sup>78</sup> Lake, ‘Confronting Backlash States,’ p.55

<sup>79</sup> Moussali, *US Foreign Policy and Islamist Politics*, p.21

<sup>80</sup> Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy*; Jeffrey Fields, *Adversaries and Statecraft: Explaining U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Rogue States*, PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2007

<sup>81</sup> Blight et al, *Becoming Enemies*, Appendix I

worldwide in the two decades after the 1979 revolution have deepened American suspicions about Iranian support and involvement in terrorist activities.

Amongst these is the assassination of Iranian dissidents and opposition figures in Europe, for which Iranian officials have been blamed (and in some cases legally indicted). As discussed in chapter 5, among the most high-profile examples is Shapour Bakhtiar, the last of the shah's prime ministers, who was stabbed to death in Paris in 1991, an event that had a major impact on the perception of Iran in the US government.<sup>82</sup> The following year, several Kurdish-Iranian dissidents were shot dead in a Berlin restaurant. Five people were arrested, tried and convicted by the German authorities over the following three years, including one Iranian. At the end of the trial in 1996, the court concluded that the assassination had been planned and executed by agents of the Iranian state with the approval of President Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khamenei, and issued a warrant for the arrest of Ali Fallahian, Iran's minister of intelligence and security.<sup>83</sup> This led to a brief break in diplomatic relations between Iran and the member states of the EU, who withdrew their ambassadors in protest.<sup>84</sup> The same year, the US State Department's annual report on global terrorism claimed that "Tehran conducted at least eight dissident assassinations outside Iran in 1996." These included "Reza Mazlouman, a government official under the Shah [who] was murdered in Paris by an Iranian resident of Germany with alleged ties to Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS)."<sup>85</sup>

The year 1996 also saw another terrorist attack that directly affected the relationship between the US and Iran. The Khobar Towers, an American military housing block in the Saudi city of Dhahran, was blown up by a truck bomb, killing 19 US Air Force personnel. Given the poor state of relations between the US and Iran, suspicion initially fell on Shia militants within Saudi

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<sup>82</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p.248

<sup>83</sup> US State Department, 'Patterns of Global Terrorism 1996: Overview of State Sponsored Terrorism' <http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1996Report/overview.html> accessed 27-01-2013

<sup>84</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p.290-1

<sup>85</sup> US State Department, 'Patterns of Global Terrorism 1996: Overview of State Sponsored Terrorism'

Arabia linked to Iran.<sup>86</sup> President Clinton would subsequently ask President Khatami for some of the members of the groups accused of carrying out the attack, alleged to be in Iran, to be extradited to Saudi Arabia, first via the government of Oman,<sup>87</sup> and then directly via a letter delivered to an Iranian diplomat at the UN.<sup>88</sup> The Iranian government responded by denying any involvement.<sup>89</sup> Clinton ordered the Pentagon to prepare contingencies for retaliatory strikes against Iran, but given the ambiguous nature of the evidence and the risk this posed to his attempts to improve relations in the wake of Khatami's elections, he decided to avoid military confrontation.<sup>90</sup> The passage of ILSA in the same year was smoothed by the image of Iran (and Libya, which was also a target of the act thanks to the efforts of Senator Ted Kennedy and the advocacy of some of the relatives of the victims of the Lockerbie bombing)<sup>91</sup> as a terrorist state thanks to all of these incidents, and the explosion of flight TWA 800 off the coast of the US while the legislation was being debated, though this was later revealed to have been caused by mechanical failure.<sup>92</sup>

## 6.6 The role of Israel and the Arab-Israeli peace process

Israel played an ancillary but critical role in shaping American perceptions of threat, both of political Islam in general and Iran in particular. Israeli leaders were outspoken about the threat they perceived stemming from both of these sources, and urged the US to confront and contain both of them. Because of the strong links between the US and Israel, and the historic antipathy between the US and Iran, this proved to be an effective strategy. Moussali, for one, argues that American 'dual containment' policy stemmed directly from Israel's desire to contain "Islamic fundamentalism and Arab nationalism

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<sup>86</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf, 2004), p.718

<sup>87</sup> Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, p.224-6

<sup>88</sup> The text of his message can be found at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB318/doc02.pdf> accessed 27-01-2013

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB318/doc03.pdf> accessed 27-01-2013

<sup>90</sup> Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, p.171 and p.218

<sup>91</sup> Author interview with Keith Weissman, former AIPAC official, Washington DC, March 2012

<sup>92</sup> Gary Sick, 'Rethinking Dual Containment,' *Survival*, 40 (1) 1998, p.10

‘indirectly’.”<sup>93</sup> This is something of an exaggeration, as it risks under-representing the role of the legacy of hostility between the US and Iran discussed above, and American perceptions of its own strategic interests in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Nonetheless, Moussali is correct in that direct lobbying by Israel and its leaders, and pre-existing American concerns about Israeli security, played an important role in shaping American perceptions in both the executive and the legislative branches of the US government. As Kemp argued, “If the United States is the “third rail” of Iranian politics, Israel is the “third rail” of US politics. Hostility to Israel has done more to harm Iran’s image in the United States, especially within Congress, than any issue since the 1979–1980 hostage crisis.”<sup>94</sup>

The nature of the ‘special relationship’ between Israel and the US was itself a major factor in this development. The presence of Israel within the classic triad of US objectives in the Middle East – containing Soviet power, the free flow of oil at reasonable prices, ensuring Israel’s survival – has ensured that US policy has been consistently formulated with an eye towards accommodating Israeli security requirements, giving Israeli leaders a great deal of leverage with the US. Consequently, despite the end of the Cold War and a swelling of negative feelings in Congress and the US more widely against foreign aid, Israel (followed by Egypt) remained the largest recipient of American aid, despite the decline in its strategic utility as an anti-Soviet proxy.<sup>95</sup> The provision of a major aid package to Egypt as part of that given to Israel demonstrates this trend also, as does American fears of the rise of political Islamist forces in Egypt and elsewhere - it was feared in many quarters that they too, like Iran, would be implacably hostile to Israel. This also reflects the nature of the division of power in the American political system, discussed briefly above and in more detail in chapters 7 and 8, with legislators in Congress being generally more accessible and more sympathetic to Israel, and, thanks to the ‘separation of powers,’ holding final say over federal budgets.

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<sup>93</sup> Moussali, *US Foreign Policy and Islamist Politics*, p.22

<sup>94</sup> Geoffrey Kemp, ‘Iran: Can the United States Do a Deal?’ *The Washington Quarterly*, 24 (1) 2001, p.115

<sup>95</sup> A full statistical breakdown is available at the website of USAID:  
<http://gbk.eads.usaidallnet.gov/data/detailed.html> accessed 27-01-2013

### 6.6.1 Rabin and Clinton

In the early 1990s, presidential attention shifted to focus on the ‘peace process’ that began with the Oslo Accords. The Oslo process came to be a major preoccupation of American foreign policy in the Middle East throughout Clinton’s tenure in the White House, both because of its inherent connection to Israeli security, and the personal investment of the President in the issue. Clinton involved himself personally in many of the negotiation between Israel and the PLO, and struggled to obtain an Israel-Syrian peace accord as well,<sup>96</sup> including meeting personally with Hafez Al-Assad in Geneva. Though neither effort would result in success, this was not from want of involvement or attention on the American side (though of course there are those who would question Washington’s motives and tactics), and American efforts continued until Clinton left office at the end of 2000. Clinton himself discussed the issue extensively in his memoirs, especially his close relationship with Yitzhak Rabin, one of the prime movers on the Israeli side and the Prime Minister for most of Clinton’s first term in office. Reflecting on Rabin’s assassination, Clinton wrote that “In the two and a half years that we had worked together, Rabin and I had developed an unusually close relationship, marked by candor, trust, and an extraordinary understanding of each other’s political positions and thought processes.”<sup>97</sup> Rabin was, according to some accounts, ‘obsessed’ with the threat posed by Iran,<sup>98</sup> and seems to have been forceful in impressing on President Clinton his desire to see Iran contained as a necessary step on the road towards an Arab-Israeli peace settlement.<sup>99</sup> For Rabin and many of his colleagues in the Labor Party, like Shimon Peres, the demographic trends within Israel and the Occupied Territories demonstrated a serious risk to Israeli security: the high Palestinian birth-rate threatened to make Israel’s conventional military superiority irrelevant by

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<sup>96</sup> Warren Christopher, for instance, visited Syria 25 times during his tenure as Secretary of State. Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy*, p.48

<sup>97</sup> Clinton, *My Life*, p.679

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Lippman, *Madeleine Albright and the New American Diplomacy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), p.175

<sup>99</sup> Author interview with Steve Rosen, former AIPAC official, Silver Springs, MD, March 2012



endangering the state's Jewish and democratic character.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, Iran had emerged as a serious rival in the wake of the collapse of Iraqi military power. Rabin's strategy was therefore two-fold: make peace with the Palestinians and the 'collar' countries surrounding Israel, and neutralise Iran by enlisting US support.<sup>101</sup> The White House therefore became more focused on Iran thanks to this pressure from the Israeli side, which used the leverage of progress towards a peace agreement to strengthen US-Israeli ties after the end of the Cold War.

In the absence of the Cold War threat, Israel also had a vested interest in maintaining its close alignment with the US, and in order to facilitate this it required a new 'threat' to forge a common front against. Iran and political Islam, the former a pre-existing enemy for the US, proved to be the best candidates,<sup>102</sup> though to be fair the implications of the 'rise' of these forces for national security also worried Israeli policymakers to some extent: Yitzhak Rabin reportedly told Clinton that the experience of seeing Iraqi Scud missiles hitting Israel in 1991 convinced him that modern weapons made geographical distance less important,<sup>103</sup> which presumably made Iran a 'front-line state.' Iran and radical Islamism were often conflated together in Israeli official discourse. Gerges, for one, recounts how Israeli leaders like Rabin stressed the danger posed by radical political Islam in their public statements, arguing "Iran is posing the same threat as Moscow in the good old days...fundamentalism incited by Iran is infiltrating Muslim institutions in the West."<sup>104</sup> Rabin, as stated, was 'obsessed' with the threat he perceived from radical Islamism, which he saw as driven by Iran, and he declared in 1992 that "Iran is the leading distributor of fundamentalist Islam in the region. Iran has replaced Iraq in its megalomaniacal ambitions in empire building. Within seven years, this will be the threat in the Middle East. We have this time in which to resolve the problems."<sup>105</sup> Parsi, also, argues that Israeli

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<sup>100</sup> Clinton, *My Life*, p.545

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Keith Weissman, former AIPAC official, Washington DC, March 2012

<sup>102</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, chapter 14

<sup>103</sup> Clinton, *My Life*, p.545

<sup>104</sup> Gerges, *America and Political Islam*, p.53

<sup>105</sup> Yoram Peri 'Afterword', in Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, expanded edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p.365

leaders launched a public relations offensive in the US and Europe to portray Iran as the next great global threat at the beginning of the 1990s. He cites numerous examples of dire warnings of Iranian perfidy from Israeli leaders, such as Shimon Peres's assertion in 1992 that "Iran is the greatest threat [to peace] and greatest problem in the Middle East...because it seeks the nuclear option while holding a highly dangerous stance of extreme religious militarism."<sup>106</sup> This public discourse was matched by briefings of US government officials by their visiting Israeli counterparts about the threat posed by Iran to Israel.<sup>107</sup>

### 6.6.2 Enter Khatami and Netanyahu

The focus within Israel on Iran as a threat survived the death of Rabin at the hands of an Israeli religious extremist in November 1995 and changes of government. Both Shimon Peres (Rabin's immediate successor as PM) and Ehud Barak (then the Foreign Minister) warned that Iran was developing nuclear weapons, making it "more dangerous than Nazism", to use Peres's words.<sup>108</sup> The election of Likud and Benjamin Netanyahu to the office of Prime Minister in 1996 caused Israel to reverse direction somewhat, with a new strategic focus on the Palestinians rather than Iran and less commitment to the peace process. Uri Lubrani, Netanyahu's most senior advisor on Iran, reportedly concluded that Khatami's election represented an "irreversible" trend towards moderation, which was echoed by other Israeli officials, including the Israeli ambassador to the US.<sup>109</sup> Lubrani apparently travelled to the US to impress this view upon President Clinton, Secretary of State Albright and Martin Indyk,<sup>110</sup> and "[a]ccordingly, the Israelis toned down their anti-Iran rhetoric, reduced their pressure on Congress, and encouraged Clinton to pursue engagement."<sup>111</sup> Nonetheless, this diversion failed to resolve the fundamental sources of disagreements between the US, Israel and Iran, so "In the end, Netanyahu's

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<sup>106</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.164

<sup>107</sup> Author interview with Ambassador Chas Freeman, Washington DC, February 2011

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.193

<sup>109</sup> Lippman, *Madeleine Albright and the New American Diplomacy*, p.175-6

<sup>110</sup> Thomas Lippman, correspondence with author

<sup>111</sup> Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, p.218

efforts amounted to nothing but a brief Israeli-Iranian spring thaw.”<sup>112</sup> As Iran continued to develop missile technology and pursue nuclear energy (including pressing ahead with the construction of a nuclear reactor at Bushehr with Russian assistance), the Israeli government returned to the subject of the Iranian threat.<sup>113</sup>

Israeli fears of Iranian developments in missile technology was a factor in American unease with the progress of Iran’s ballistic missile development programmes, such as the *Shahab-3*, a version of the North Korean *Nodong-1* (which was in turn based on the venerable Soviet ‘Scud’), and was developed and tested during the 1990s.<sup>114</sup> Aside from the threat that Iran’s possession of such weapons posed to American facilities in the Persian Gulf and to American allies on the Arab coast of the Gulf, the development of ballistic missiles by Iran placed Israel within its strike range, something which was widely trumpeted as a dangerous development, despite Israel’s possession of a deterrent force of land-based nuclear-armed ‘Jericho’ IRBM/ICBMs (and possibly submarines with ‘Popeye Turbo’ cruise missiles), and Iran’s status as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). As seen in chapter 5, members of Congress therefore introduced legislation designed to impose sanctions on Russian and Chinese firms at the urging of Israel and pro-Israeli lobbyists and over the objections of the White House.<sup>115</sup> In addition, Israeli officials also travelled to Washington to brief American legislators and their staff on Iran’s missile and nuclear programs.<sup>116</sup>

### 6.6.3 The peace process

From the beginnings of the policy in 1993, ‘dual containment’ was therefore envisaged partly as a way of erecting a ‘firewall’ between the most consequential issues and geographic areas for the US: Israel and its dispute with

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<sup>112</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.201

<sup>113</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.206

<sup>114</sup> Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy*, p.187

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Lippman, ‘Israel Presses US To Sanction Russian Missile Firms Aiding Iran,’ *Washington Post*, September 25 1997

<sup>116</sup> Author phone interview Stephen Rademaker, former Chief Counsel, House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, February 2011, Washington DC

the neighbouring Arab states, and Iraq, Iran and the Persian Gulf. The primary architect of dual containment, Martin Indyk, held a variety of roles in the Clinton administration working on Middle East policy. His memoir of his time in government focuses heavily on his (and President Clinton's) involvement in the Oslo Process. On the situation at the beginning of 1993, Indyk writes that "Clinton's immediate challenge was to develop and approach to protecting American interests in the Gulf that would bolster his peacemaking priorities in the Arab-Israeli arena."<sup>117</sup> Indyk concedes that an Arab-Israeli peace agreement was, for Clinton, the "primary objective." As such, "dual containment was one branch of a broader strategy designed to generate a dramatic shift in the regional balance of power that we hoped would result from the achievement of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace." The 'normalisation' of the Middle East would, in turn, marginalise Iran and Iraq and assist in the 'containment' of them.<sup>118</sup>

Chapter 5 discussed Indyk's account of how the incoming administration conducted interagency reviews on how to pursue objectives vis-à-vis Iran and Iraq. Regarding Iran, he concedes that it was seen as the "archetype of a hostile, rogue regime."<sup>119</sup> 'Containment' emerged from the process as the best option by default: Iran was believed to be hostile to both the US and Israel, making attempts to change its behaviour via "positive incentives" futile, while military action against it was risky and uncertain.<sup>120</sup> This view was maintained until the election of Khatami, which was a surprise to most observers of Iranian politics in both official circles and academia. Consequently, Indyk maintains that the Rafsanjani government's decision to offer Conoco a major contract in 1995 was seen by the Clinton administration as an attempt to embarrass the US and 'break out' of the containment regime, rather than the overture it appears to have been in retrospect,<sup>121</sup> as does Kenneth Pollack.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, p.32

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p.43

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p.39

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p.39

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p.168, Author interview with Martin Indyk, Washington DC, March 2012; Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, p.52.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Pollack

Iran's public opposition to the 'peace process', including its support for some rejectionist Palestinian factions, was therefore a major point of contention between Washington and Tehran, and was one of the Clinton administration's stated reasons for labelling Iran as, variously, a 'rogue' or 'backlash' state. Iran's hostility to the developments in the Arab-Israeli arena had multiple dimensions: on the one hand, it represented a geostrategic problem, on the other a more nebulous but equally real ideological/cultural threat (ironically, in much the same way that many Americans viewed Iran). Strategically, it threatened to isolate Iran from its allies in the Levant, Syria and Lebanon's Hezbollah, and "took Iran dangerously close to being frozen out of the unfolding regional order following the first Iraq war."<sup>123</sup> This not only threatened to undermine Iran's influence in the Levant, it also contradicted Iran's view of itself as an influential regional state that deserved a 'seat at the table' when decisions were taken that would have profound effects on regional security.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, aside from the Iranian view that the process would continue to disenfranchise the Palestinians, it also "had become such a key politico-moral problem and an Islamic issue that necessitated the country's formal opposition to the peace process on religious grounds."<sup>125</sup> Iranian leaders escalated anti-Israeli rhetoric and publically opposed the Madrid Conference of October 1991 accordingly. A conference of Palestinian groups opposed to negotiations with Israel was subsequently organised in Tehran, placing Iran in direct opposition to the peace negotiations.<sup>126</sup> Iran's reaffirmation of its sponsorship and public backing of Hezbollah in Lebanon, after a 'dip' in financial aid,<sup>127</sup> was also a catalysing factor, given the low-intensity warfare between Hezbollah and Israeli forces until Israel's withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000. Ironically, American and Israeli attempts, as Parsi and Indyk agree, to isolate Iran from the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations gave it an incentive to oppose them, though it is debateable

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<sup>123</sup> Anoush Ehtashami, 'Iran's Regional Policies Since the End of the Cold War', in Ali Gheissari (ed.), *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.333

<sup>124</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.153-4

<sup>125</sup> Ehtashami, 'Iran's Regional Policies Since the End of the Cold War', p.333

<sup>126</sup> Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy*, p.164; Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.155

<sup>127</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.155

that Iran ever possessed sufficient power to derail the process if both Israel and the PLO were determined to press ahead.<sup>128</sup>

Following the election of Khatami there was nonetheless a discernible shift in Iranian attitudes to the peace process,<sup>129</sup> which, as discussed above, was arguably as much a tactical issue as an ideological one for many Iranian policymakers. As the Oslo process stalled and difficulties mounted, the threat to Iran of regional isolation lessened and rhetoric softened. There was also an acceptance that opposition to the peace accords made Iran vulnerable in certain ways, damaging its international reputation and pitting it against Yasser Arafat and the PLO. Khatami and other officials therefore moderated their rhetoric, and signalled that they considered it futile to continue to oppose the process while the Palestinian leadership was committed, and that even if Iran disagreed with their decision to do so it would not seek to interfere. Khatami said in 1997: “Iran resolutely oppose[s] the peace operation, but, based on the principle of mutual respect, it does not stand in front of [the Palestinians].”<sup>130</sup> Other statements seem to confirm this view, such as his denunciation of terrorism in his famous 1998 CNN interview with Christine Amanpour (though he distinguished between ‘terrorists’ and ‘freedom fighters’).<sup>131</sup> It was also reported that Khatami informed Yasser Arafat that Iran would acquiesce to an agreement with Israel at the 1997 meeting of the OIC in Tehran, though Iranian policymakers believed the peace process would ultimately fail.<sup>132</sup> While denunciations of the peace process were still forthcoming from many Iranian political leaders for domestic consumption, these private messages, and the difficulties encountered by the peace process at this time, moderated the threat Iran posed to the peace process and encouraged the Clinton administration to explore the option of reconciliation under Khatami.

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<sup>128</sup> Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, p.51.

<sup>129</sup> Steve Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States in the Persian Gulf, 1972-2005* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins university Press, 2008), p.99

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Hoonan Peimani, *Iran and the United States: The Rise of the West Asian Regional Grouping* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), p.92

<sup>131</sup> Interview transcript available at <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html> accessed 24-01-2013

<sup>132</sup> Robin Wright, ‘Clinton Encourages More Exchanges, Better Ties With Iran’, *Los Angeles Times*, 30 January 1998.

The election of Khatami was seized upon by President Clinton, and he reportedly calculated that it represented an opportunity to ‘break the ice’ and begin overtures towards Iran, despite the hostility towards the country expressed by some in the US in his first term.<sup>133</sup> Khatami’s public statements and actions were therefore closely monitored by US officials, especially his CNN interview, as Clinton believed that a breakthrough in relations with Iran represented the chance for a wider shift in the region in a positive direction, from the American perspective.<sup>134</sup> However, Clinton remained conscious of the obstacles of such a course of action, particularly those faced by Khatami within Iran, and expressed concern that American attempts to respond to his overtures ran the risk of delegitimizing the Iranian leader. In private, he described attempts at public diplomacy as “dicey” in the absence of an overriding strategic imperative for the Iranians to launch a rapprochement with the US. Although he believed there was more room for him to move the process forwards, he admitted that his advisers were nearly unanimous in pressing for a more cautious, low-key approach.<sup>135</sup> Many officials also worried that a bold gesture of the part of the US risked handing a propaganda victory to the Iranians, and were wary of making concessions which might not be reciprocated.<sup>136</sup> The issue of the Khobar Towers bombing was also a contentious one, though ultimately it was decided within the administration that testing Khatami’s intentions was a better idea than a military retaliation.<sup>137</sup> The initial response to the election of Khatami on the part of the Clinton administration was therefore a restrained, at least in public, though by the

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<sup>133</sup> Kenneth Pollack, then a National Security Council official, recalls that he was sent to ‘sound out’ proponents of sanctions on Iran about the overture, but that the president had decided to proceed anyway. Author Interview with Pollack.

<sup>134</sup> Taylor Branch, *The Clinton Tapes: Conversations with a President, 1993-2001* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2009), p.487

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p.498-9

<sup>136</sup> Barbara Slevin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2007), p.187-8

<sup>137</sup> Martin Indyk, *Innocent Abroad*, p.217.

end of 1997 Clinton and his team had become convinced of Khatami's bona fides, and were ready to begin testing the waters.<sup>138</sup>

## 6.8 Conclusions

The close attention theorists of neoclassical realism have given to the role of perception as an intervening variable in the formation of foreign policy is justified if we consider the case of Iran and the US in the 1990s. Perceptions of threat and relative power were key factors in determining the course of US foreign policy in this period, underlying and defining the concerns of American policymakers.

While some prominent commentators and politicians expressed hostility towards Islamist forces throughout the 1990s, official US policy outwardly tended towards studious neutrality in regards to this phenomenon, and did not seem to have perceived it as a major challenge to American policy, on a par with the Soviet Union. American officials who held posts in the US foreign policy apparatus, from President Clinton on down, took pains to state that the US was not hostile to Islam per se, but was not sympathetic to groups and movements that were perceived as anti-democratic or endangered US interests or those of its allies. While the US kept its distance from Islamist groups, such as the various national branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, this does not seem to have reflected a sectarian bias. Nonetheless, the legacy of hostility between the US and Iran had a major impact on American perceptions of the threat posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The hostage crisis, the events of the 1980s, and continuing Iranian hostile rhetoric towards Israel and the peace process persuaded the incoming Clinton administration to pursue a relatively tough line against Iran from the outset. Iran was perceived as a volatile and dangerous force, one that had strong incentives to contest American and Israeli policies given its ideological and strategic interests. The containment of this regional

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<sup>138</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p.312 and 320



threat was also perceived to be a low-cost, low-risk policy. This was facilitated by the strategic picture perceived by American policymakers, one in which American power was abundant and applicable in a permissive regional environment, given the military prostration of Iran and Iraq and the absence of a counterbalancing Soviet Union.

This negative perception of Iran (and Iraq) was shared by Israel, its allies within the US, and the other major actor in American foreign policy: Congress. These forces shared a more ‘confrontationalist’ perception of the threat posed from Iran. While it would be too simplistic, not to say somewhat inaccurate, to argue for a binary distinction between an ‘accommodationist’ executive branch and a ‘confrontationalist’ legislature, this does capture something of the real distinction between the two bodies. While the Clinton administration itself possessed a relatively nuanced (if unsympathetic) view of Iran, some legislators tended to be more willing to see Iran simply as a dangerous threat that required the use of American power to challenge and overcome. In the following chapters, we shall see how the division of powers in American foreign policy enabled legislators to influence US dual containment policy, and the efforts of interest groups to persuade them to do so.

## **CHAPTER 7 Domestic Institutions as an intervening variable: Two Voices?**

“Within the United States, the domestic context of US foreign policy derives from societal forces and the institutional arrangements and structures established by the US Constitution. This context makes societal forces – political culture, public opinion, and group interests and activity – a critical part of the US foreign policy arena, and it establishes a complex set of fluctuating arrangements among the people and institutions of government. Hence, understanding how US foreign policy makers adapt to the issues and problems of the international environment first requires a grasp of the societal and institutional settings within which they act.”<sup>1</sup>

“Perhaps the moment of sharpest conflict came in 1995-6 with the imposition of controls on foreign investment in the Iranian energy sector: yet, even here, Washington itself spoke in two voices – Congressional and Presidential.”<sup>2</sup>

Having discussed the critical role of the perceptions of policymakers in the previous chapter, it is now time to consider the institutional context in which policy is made and enacted, and how the perceptions discussed in the previous chapter were acted upon and translated into the policy process. This chapter deals with the effect of Congressional input on the policymaking process, and therefore how it affected the conception and implementation of dual containment. As discussed in chapter 5, Congress proved to be quite active in its attempts to shape American policy towards Iran and Iraq during the 1990s, and many of the measures that the US put in place to isolate Iran and the overt change in policy towards ‘regime change’ in Iraq originated in Congress rather than the White House. To explain this feature of ‘dual containment’ policy, it is necessary to examine how far these measures reflected the distribution of

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<sup>1</sup> James A Scott and A. Lane Crothers, ‘Out of the Cold: The Post-Cold War Context of U.S. Foreign Policy,’ in James M. Scott, *After the End: Making U.S. Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p.2

<sup>2</sup> Fred Halliday, ‘The Iranian Revolution and International Politics: Some European Perspectives’, in John Esposito & R. K. Ramazani (eds.), *Iran at the Crossroads* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p.179

political power between the two branches of government, and the effects of this on policymaking. Ultimately these issues are aspects of a larger question, of how far the ‘separation of powers’ established in the US Constitution impact upon foreign policy making.

It is argued in this chapter that while the US Congress did not initiate the dual containment policy, some legislators were successful in using their powers to ensure that it was taken more seriously by the executive branch. In that sense, they were not only also able to exert some influence over the shape the policy took in practice, but also able to control the direction of American foreign policy to some extent, though the course of events was such that the latter point was never seriously contested. This stemmed from the growing importance of Congress in American foreign policy in recent decades, but was also a product of the original ‘separation of powers’ between the different branches of the US government established in the Constitution and by over two centuries of accumulated tradition and practice. Legislators also functioned as the medium by which other actors (the Israeli government and their lobbyists) were able to exert pressure, which will be discussed more fully in the following chapter.

The chapter is structured as follows: firstly, it re-examines the approach of more recent NCR scholarship to domestic institutions, drawing on studies following after the ‘founding texts’ or ‘second wave’ of NCR discussed in chapter 2. Secondly, it examines the nature of the ‘separation of powers’ and the division of labour between the executive and legislature in US foreign policymaking and the factors affecting it. Thirdly, it examines the specific case of US politics in the timeframe of dual containment and the most important institutional factors in this era influencing the implementation of this policy (such as the Republican victory in the 1994 mid-term elections). Finally, this chapter includes an assessment of the overall effects, and therefore importance, of this intervening variable in determining the course of US-Iran and US-Iraqi relations.

## 7.1 Dual containment and domestic structure as an intervening variable

The domestic institutional context in which foreign policy is made is often considered to be a highly significant determining factor amongst theorists of both NCR and FPA. As discussed in chapter 2, a distinctive feature of neoclassical realism (NCR) is its claim that foreign policy is a “product of state-society coordination and, at times, struggle.”<sup>3</sup> While the primary force driving and shaping foreign policy formation is the demands of the international system, how these demands are met is an issue strongly affected by the intervening variables operating at what Waltz called the ‘second image’ (the individual state).<sup>4</sup> The institutional aspects of this tend to centre on the ability of the machinery of state and its leaders to extract resources from society. This is conditioned by how a state’s political institutions are structured, which may assist or hinder the foreign policy executive’s (FPE) attempts to mobilise national assets. A system of government in which the FPE has few institutional limits on its power, a ‘strong’ state to use the terminology used by Risse and others finds this much easier and simpler than their counterparts in a ‘weak’ state, where they must take account of the preferences of other domestic political actors. It seems that there no real intra-FPE division over dual containment within the agencies most closely connected to the executive branch, such as between the State Department and the Defense Department, or between the National Security Council and the State Department as in other administrations. In general, relations between the power centres within the administration itself have been described as “collegial.”<sup>5</sup> In contrast to intra-executive feuding (which can nonetheless be a significant factor in American foreign policy), the separation of powers between the Congress and the presidency is inherent, and has always had profound implications for foreign policy making, and the influence of the legislature in this regard has varied throughout American history.

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Introduction’, Steve Lobell, Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro, (eds.) *Neoclassical Realism, The State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.27

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Man, The State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001)

<sup>5</sup> John Dumbrell, *Clinton’s Foreign Policy: Between the Bushes, 1992-2000* (Abingdon; Routledge, 2009), p.36

Accordingly, while the White House has become predominant in the day to day management of foreign affairs, it is impossible to understand the making of American foreign policy in wider terms without taking Congressional input into account.

This overlapping responsibility for foreign affairs is one of the reasons that Risse contends the US FPE is relatively ‘weak’ in terms of its autonomy in decision-making. More specifically, the foreign policymaking apparatus of the executive branch and both houses of Congress have separate powers but an overlapping jurisdiction to some extent, which has often led to friction and disagreement over the direction and content of policy. We saw in chapter 5 how ‘dual containment’ was originally formulated within President Clinton’s National Security Council and how it was modified by Congressional legislation that was introduced independently of presidential initiative. This chapter examines both how this is made possible by the structure of the American political system and how this can be understood within the NCR framework that incorporates variables influenced by FPA used in this thesis. Though the American system is, of course, unique to the US, NCR analysis beyond the ‘third wave’ of studies discussed in chapter 2 has been fruitfully applied to both the foreign policy formulation of other states as well as that of the US at different times and in different contexts<sup>6</sup> (while many of these analyses have also been applied to ‘grand strategy’, no overriding methodological reason exists that precludes attempting the same thing with ‘dual containment,’ a major regional policy). Consequently, many other NCR studies focus on the ability of foreign policymaking executive to extract the resources necessary to pursue its chosen policies, and how the need to ‘bargain’ with domestic political power centres that control the allocation of these resources leads to compromise on said policies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Examples of the latter include Thomas Christensen’s *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict 1947-1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Fareed Zakaria’s *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998)

<sup>7</sup> For example, to mobilise military resources for defence or achieve a balance of power. See Jeffrey Taliaferro, ‘State Building for Future War: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource Extractive State’, *Security Studies*, 15 (3) 2006, pp.464-95; Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006)

This has the potential to not only affect the level of resources available for specific policies, but also the overall direction of policy itself.

In the case of dual containment, the effects of institutional structure with regards to resource-extraction are indirect. This case is not one in which the FPE is obliged to compromise with the legislature (or another influential power centre) to obtain the resources necessary for its policy. Instead, the reverse is true, with the legislature pressuring the executive to ‘beef up’ its policies, in some cases allocating more resources than those requested by the executive and insisting on their use. This has some similarities with recent research in NCR. Ripsman, discussed in chapter 2, hypothesises that in a democracy a powerful legislature with the ability to “act as a veto for the government’s policy agenda” is one of the interest groups best placed to be able to influence foreign policy. Some other NCR scholars, also discussed in chapter two, focuses on the clash of ideas, perceptions within the political processes of states and the effect that this has on foreign and defence policies, and in doing so indirectly introduce the idea that the domestic structure of a state is an important factor. Steven Lobell, for example, examines how perceptions of international threats are constructed within states, and concludes that “the degree of consensus among the [foreign policymaking executive] and key societal supporters” plays a substantial role in determining how states formulate policies, though his example is more focused on economic issues. Mark Brawley comes to similar conclusions in his analysis of alliance formation and the balance of power in interwar Europe, where “[n]ot only did [foreign] policy decisions generate public outcry, they divided parties from parties, factions within individual parties, and even cabinets.”<sup>8</sup> In the case of dual containment there is a more subtle (but still important) aspect to the activist policies pursued by the legislative branch, in that these also have implications for the ‘ownership’ of US policy in the Persian Gulf, and towards Iran specifically, which are rooted in the formal divisions of power between the executive and legislative branches.

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<sup>8</sup> Steven Lobell, ‘Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model,’ and Mark Brawley, ‘Neoclassical realism and strategic calculations: explaining divergent British, French, and Soviet strategies toward Germany between the world wars (1919-30), in Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, p.96

## 7.2 Congressional and Executive roles in foreign policy

While the president is commonly held to be the ‘prime mover’ in the formation of American foreign policy, the nature of the American political system is such that the legislative branch, Congress (comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives), has both the opportunity and the means to influence the process substantially. The ramifications of this are examined in this section.

The office of president is widely acknowledged amongst scholars and observers of American politics to be predominant in the formulation of US foreign policy. Not only does the president act as commander-in-chief of the military, he or she is also “the principal negotiator of treaties, and the chief diplomatic representative of the nation,” while the Supreme Court defined the presidency’s grasp on foreign policy as ‘plenary and exclusive’ in a ruling in 1936, which paved the way for the proliferation of the executive branch’s foreign policy advisory and management institutions (e.g. The National Security Council) after the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> Colin Dueck, in his analysis of the foreign policy positions adopted by the Republican Party in the twentieth century, also argues that presidential leadership is often the decisive factor in determining foreign policy within parties as well as in the American body politic, stating that not only are presidents generally given ‘more latitude’ to conduct foreign policy than they are domestic, but also that, “to a remarkable extent, when one party occupies the White House, the party’s foreign policy is what the president says it is.”<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, the president is far from ‘all-powerful’ in foreign policymaking. This stems from the nature of the US Constitution, both in the

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<sup>9</sup> Edward R. Drachman & Alan Shank, *Presidents and Foreign Policy: Countdown to 10 Controversial Decisions*, Albany (NY: SUNY Press, 1997), p.5

<sup>10</sup> Colin Dueck, *Hard Line: The Republican Party and U.S. Foreign Policy Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p.6-7

powers its creators allotted to Congress outright, also and those which are not explicitly allocated to any branch of government, a state of affairs which has been famously characterised as “an invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy.”<sup>11</sup> In the words of Edwin Corwin, “The verdict of history, in short, is that the power to determine the substantive content of American foreign policy is *divided* power, with the lion’s share falling usually, though by no means always, to the President.”<sup>12</sup> He emphasises, however, that the latter state of affairs is not the necessary consequence of this particular separation of powers, but instead a contingent one:

What the Constitution does, *and all that it does*, is to confer on the President certain powers capable of affecting our foreign relations, and certain other powers of the same general kind on the Senate, and still other such powers on Congress; but which of these organs shall have the decisive and final voice in determining the course of the American nation is left for events to resolve.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, the issue of the balance of power between these two branches of government in American foreign policy is one that recurs frequently and resembles a ‘perpetual struggle.’ Therefore, the status of the relationship between the presidency and Congress plays a significant role in determining American foreign policy, and it is argued by many scholars that the “contest between the White House and Congress for a dominant position in the conduct of foreign affairs is one of the constants in [American] history.”<sup>14</sup> In this chapter, it is argued that ‘dual containment’ and American policy towards Iran in particular is no exception.

In comparison to many other Western parliaments the powers of the US legislature in the realm of foreign policy are quite extensive when considered in their totality. In terms of the powers explicitly assigned to the legislative branch,

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<sup>11</sup> Edwin S Corwin, *The President: Office and Powers 1787-1957: History and Analysis of Practice and Opinion*, 4th edition (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1964), p.171

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Italics present in the original text.

<sup>14</sup> Cecil Crabb & Pat Holt, *Invitation to Struggle: Congress, the President, and Foreign Policy*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1992), p.ix



these are divided further between the Senate and the House of Representatives, multiplying the number of points at which legislators can attempt to influence the policy process. The approval of the Senate in particular is required in the executive's choice of senior policymakers and officials such as cabinet members and diplomats. International treaties must also be approved by the Senate before they can be ratified, which famously rejected the League of Nations, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and the Kyoto Protocol (the first two were voted down, the latter was not presented for ratification because it was obvious it would not be accepted), despite the fact they had been negotiated and 'signed' by the executive branch. Speaking of Congress more generally (both the House of Representatives and the Senate), the Constitution allots it the power to:

lay and collect taxes for the common defense, to regulate foreign commerce, to create armies and maintain navies, to pledge the credit of the United States, to declare war, to define offenses against the law of nations and to make "all laws which shall be necessary and proper" for carrying into execution not only its own powers, but all the powers "of the government of the United States and of any department or officer thereof."<sup>15</sup>

Formally, therefore, Congress has enormous and wide-ranging powers. The most obvious of these are the power to declare war, and to raise and spend money (though the former, in particular, has proven to be surprisingly ineffectual in practice: in American history, Congress has very rarely declared war, as opposed to being bypassed or having its hand forced in some way).<sup>16</sup> This leaves the 'power of the purse', which is arguably the most important, and allows Congress to "determine the size, duties, budget, and activities of the State Department; the size, composition, and effectiveness of the nation's military and economic assistance programs abroad; and nearly all other major and minor undertakings by the United States in external affairs."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Corwin, *The President Office and Powers*, p.184-5

<sup>16</sup> Between 1798 and 1983 the U.S. deployed its armed forces more than 200 times, while Congress has only declared war 5 times, four of which occurred after the outbreak of hostilities. Joseph Avella, 'The President, Congress, and Decisions to Employ Military Force', in Phillip Henderson (ed.), *The Presidency Then and Now* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p.51

<sup>17</sup> Cecil Crabb, Glen Antizzo & Leila Sarriddine, *Congress and the Foreign Policy Process: Modes of Legislative Behavior* (Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State University Press: 2000), p.3-4

How can this be reconciled with the fact that the President is acknowledged to be the 'prime mover' in foreign policy? More importantly, what can the contours of Congressional powers in foreign policymaking be said to be? The answer to the first question is found primarily in the advantages that stem both from the nature of the office of the presidency and its own Constitutional prerogatives. The President is both commander-in-chief of the military and chief executive, and therefore head of the machinery of government, and also has the advantage of being the sole decision-maker within the sphere of his or her own competencies. In contrast, Congress, taken as a whole is an unwieldy (in comparison) collection of over 500 individuals, and must reach a majority position on an issue in order to play an effective role. Its decision-making process is therefore slower and more ponderous, and the instruments it has to exert its influence are far more indirect. The President has the inherent advantage of being able to create 'facts on the ground' to which Congress must then acquiesce, actively support, or try to reverse. A classic example is the deployment of military forces abroad, which, as discussed below, congress attempted to restrict with mixed success. Reaching a decision on less stark examples is doubtless a much more difficult challenge for an unwieldy legislature split by party and faction and with little direct control over the federal bureaucracy. As Rossiter argues:

Constitution, laws, customs, the practice of other nations, and the logic of history have combined to place the President in a dominant position. Secrecy, dispatch, unity, continuity, and access to information – the ingredients of successful diplomacy – are properties of his office, and Congress, I need hardly add, possess none of them.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the 'separation of powers' ensures that Congress has certain tools and tactics it can use to influence policy if it chooses to do so, but the inherent difficulty of employing them successfully ensures that "a stubborn President is hard to budge, a crusading President hard to thwart."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Clinton Rossiter, *The American Presidency* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957), p.9-10

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.10

Despite the power of the president, Corwin argues that “no presidentially devised diplomatic policy can long survive without the support of Congress”.<sup>20</sup> This provides the bulk of the answer to the second question (what is the nature and extent of the foreign policy power of Congress in practice?). The nature of the separation of powers outlined in the Constitution, together with how this has been interpreted, ensures that “the US Congress has more power to influence foreign affairs than any other national legislature in the world.”<sup>21</sup> Congress is the legislative arm of the government: in general terms its legislation defines what is lawful and what is not, and what shall be funded and what shall not. It can therefore set meaningful limits on the President’s foreign policy by legislating to make certain actions impossible or forcing the executive to carry them out, refusing to approve treaties, and stipulating the conditions of how funds shall be spent and on what projects and policies. If the collective will of Congress is strong and united, it can therefore create ‘red lines’ that the president cannot cross while Congress’s will holds out, or its legislation cannot be circumvented. American history is well-stocked with examples from its earliest days, and includes issues of war and peace. For instance, the depth of isolationist feeling in the 1920s and 1930s in Congress ensured that this remained the dominant theme in US foreign policy in that era.<sup>22</sup> Congress was also able to legislate to force the Reagan administration to cut off military aid from official sources to the Contras in Nicaragua in the 1980s, forcing it to turn to illegal sources and resulting in the Iran-Contra affair.<sup>23</sup> Going further back into American history, Congressional pressure was pivotal in taking the US to war twice in the nineteenth century, in 1898 against Spain<sup>24</sup> and in 1812 against Britain<sup>25</sup>, though Presidents McKinley and Madison were reluctant. Congress was also successful in vetoing President Grant’s plans to annex Santo Domingo (the modern-day Dominican Republic).<sup>26</sup> Congress also enjoys oversight powers, and can hold public hearings on foreign

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<sup>20</sup> Corwin, *The President Office and Powers*, p.184-5

<sup>21</sup> Crabb & Holt, *Invitation to Struggle*, p.2

<sup>22</sup> Crabb, Antizzo & Sarieddine, *Congress and the Foreign Policy Process*, p.158

<sup>23</sup> Robert Pastor, ‘Disagreeing on Latin America’, in Paul Peterson (ed.), *The President, The Congress, and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), p.217

<sup>24</sup> Crabb & Holt, *Invitation to Struggle*, p.57

<sup>25</sup> Crabb, Antizzo & Sarieddine, *Congress and the Foreign Policy Process*, p.25-6

<sup>26</sup> Clinton Rossiter, *The American Presidency*, London, Hamish Hamilton, p.10

policy matters that can embarrass the administration in the public gaze. This was demonstrated by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's hearings into the Vietnam War, which did much to shape American public opinion and contributed significantly to the downfall of President Johnson.<sup>27</sup> To return to Corwin once more, "Congress has, to repeat, vast powers to determine the bounds by which a president may be left to work out a foreign policy."<sup>28</sup>

The role of the president is therefore explicitly one of the enactor of American foreign policy, and the ultimate manager of the agencies and bodies that exist to carry it out, hence the description of the office as 'diplomat in chief.' The president's role in defining the goals and means of foreign policy is more open to contestation, and depends far more on the balance of power between the executive and the legislative branches, though arguably it is somewhat skewed in the direction of the occupant of the White House. Whatever policy emerges from this process of contestation, it remains the president's duty to carry it out. To summarise, it appears that, overall, while the Presidency has enjoyed a pre-eminent position in the making and conduct of foreign policy, Congress has always enjoyed the ability to both intervene on specific issues and impose general limits on the direction and content of American foreign policy. In many ways, it is fundamental to the system put in place by the 'Founding Fathers.' To put it another way, "Interbranch competition is permanent, sewn into the Constitution".<sup>29</sup> The ultimate consequence of this, argues Corwin, is that "Not only is a struggle for power in this field thus invited; in the absence of a co-operative disposition all around it is well-nigh inevitable."<sup>30</sup> The next section examines how this was part of a longer-term trend, the following discusses how it became a particular feature true of American foreign policy in the 1990s, and how this shaped the implementation and evolution of dual containment in particular.

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<sup>27</sup> David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1992), p.420

<sup>28</sup> Corwin, *The President Office and Powers*, p.192

<sup>29</sup> Pastor, 'Disagreeing on Latin America', p.223

<sup>30</sup> Corwin, *The President Office and Powers*, p.225

### 7.3 The growth of Congressional activism and influence

As noted above, Congressional influence on foreign policy is an enduring phenomenon, with profound impact on the American foreign policy making process. Nonetheless, as Corwin notes, the balance of power between the executive and the legislative branch is “left for events to resolve,” and has therefore fluctuated at different times. As we saw in chapter 2, Zakaria argues that the balance shifted away from the legislature and towards the executive in the era following the American Civil War, leading to the growth of executive power and an increasingly activist American foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> Dual containment, on the other hand, took place in an era in which executive authority had come under increasing challenge in both domestic and foreign policy, though, as noted above, the bulk of the initiative and responsibility for foreign policy remains concentrated in the hands of the president. In term of increased Congressional influence in foreign policy, this stems from several factors that have been apparent in American politics since the 1960s.

One of these is the increased resources available to legislators. The number of support staff and aides to various congressional committees with responsibility for foreign affairs has steadily increased since the 1960s, and many of these aides are now experts in their field rather than political associates of the committee chair and members. The House Foreign Affairs Committee staff grew from 9 to 72 people between 1965 and 2001, while the Senate Foreign Relations Committee grew from 9 to 36.<sup>32</sup> In addition, while the role of Congress has increased, there has been a diffusion of power within the institutions of the House and the Senate. While power was previously concentrated in the hands of a small number of legislators, most prominently the chairmen of committees overseeing defence, foreign affairs, and finance, a number of institutional reforms has reduced their role somewhat, allowing ‘rank and file’ legislators more space to take the initiative and become policy entrepreneurs,<sup>33</sup> partly by

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<sup>31</sup> Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*

<sup>32</sup> Lee Hamilton & Jordan Tama, *A Creative Tension: The Foreign Policy Roles of the President and Congress* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002), p.28

<sup>33</sup> James M. Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of US Foreign Policy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p.27-8; Carter & Scott, *Choosing to Lead*, p.17-8

bolstering the role and autonomy of various sub-committees, which have a more open membership.<sup>34</sup> The increasing complexity of foreign affairs and the growing interconnectivity of issues and economic activity across borders has also multiplied the number of committees and legislators with an interest in, and oversight of, some aspect of foreign affairs, such as foreign trade or the regulation of financial markets, especially the increasing importance of foreign trade to the US economy in recent decades.<sup>35</sup> In addition, some argue the use of American power abroad, including the deployment and stationing of military forces and the provision of foreign aid, has naturally led to the organic growth of Congressional involvement in foreign policy, given that legislators have had more to oversee and appropriate.<sup>36</sup> Congress has also successfully taken more power to shape some aspects of foreign policy for itself through legislative measures and reforms. Arms sales to foreign states, for instance, have required congressional approval since the Arms Control Export Act of 1976,<sup>37</sup> and Congress gained the power to reject specific items in defence appropriation bills prior to 1973, allowing it to ‘de-fund’ specific projects and operations without affecting the rest of the defence budget.<sup>38</sup> The US Congress is also “notable for the weakness of its party organizations; this weakness represents the result of a long-term decline in the strength of US political parties,”<sup>39</sup> giving more scope to individual legislators to pursue their own interests and projects, though some trends in the 1990s strengthened the role of the party leadership within the Congress itself.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Norman Ornstein, ‘The Constitution and the Sharing of Foreign Policy Responsibility,’ in Edmund Muskie, Kenneth Rush, Kenneth Thompson, *The President, the Congress, and Foreign Policy* (London: University Press of America, 1986), p.55-6

<sup>35</sup> Exports accounted for 11 percent of U.S. GDP in 2000, compared with 5 percent in 1970. Meghan O’Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions: Statecraft and State Sponsors of Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), p.21

<sup>36</sup> Crabb & Holt, *Invitation to Struggle*, p.272-3

<sup>37</sup> Harold H. Saunders, ‘The Middle East, 1973-1984: Hidden Agendas,’ in Edmund Muskie, Kenneth Rush, Kenneth Thompson, *The President, the Congress, and Foreign Policy* (London: University Press of America, 1986), p.192

<sup>38</sup> Hamilton & Tama, *A Creative Tension*, p.11

<sup>39</sup> Michael Mezey, *Congress, the President, and Public Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), p.123

<sup>40</sup> James A. Thurber, ‘Stability and Change in the Post-Cold War Congress,’ in Michael Minkenberg & Herbert Dittgen (eds.), *American Impasse: U.S. Domestic And Foreign Policy After the Cold War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), p.66

Perhaps the most important factor in this trend has been psychological, with the decline in willingness to accept a monopolization of power on the part of the president and his advisors. After the national trauma of Vietnam and Watergate, and warnings about the dangers of an unchecked ‘imperial Presidency,’ the legislature has, in general, been more willing to challenge executive branch policy.<sup>41</sup> The most obvious example is the War Powers Act of 1973, designed to limit the ability of the president to deploy military forces without congressional approval.<sup>42</sup> One net effect of the diffusion and decentralisation of power within Congress has been to open the system further to interest groups seeking to influence policy, and many analysts also argue that the rise in number and influence of interest groups of various stripes competing to influence legislators has played a role in driving Congress to be less quiescent in foreign affairs.<sup>43</sup> One of the consequences of this trend has also been a marked decline in co-operation, sometimes referred to as ‘bi-partisanship’, which has arguably intensified the struggle between the executive and legislative branches. This was particularly marked in the 1990s, the era of ‘dual containment,’ and it is to this that we now turn our attention.

### **7.3.1 Congressional activism and partisan politics in the 1990s**

As described above, one of the most distinct features of the American political system is the extent to which the legislature can challenge, check and override the executive branch of the national government when it comes to foreign policy. This feature means that the potential exists not only for inter-branch conflict in foreign policymaking, but also for more intense inter-party disputes when different parties control different branches and there are therefore more opportunities to battle to control the direction of foreign policy. This was the situation that faced American policymakers following the surprise victory of the Republican Party in the 1994 mid-term elections, which saw the Republicans obtain a majority of the seats in the House of Representatives for the first time

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<sup>41</sup> Crabb & Holt, *Invitation to Struggle*, p.39-40

<sup>42</sup> Hamilton & Tama, *A Creative Tension*, p.11-2

<sup>43</sup> Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of US Foreign Policy*, p.29

since the 1950s, in what was widely described as a landslide.<sup>44</sup> Although the difference in the share of the vote between the two major parties was only 5-10%, this was sufficient to elect Republicans to 230 seats in the House of Representatives and 53 in the Senate, giving the party majorities in both chambers.<sup>45</sup> Admittedly, the focus of the new Republican Congress was ostensibly not geared towards making significant changes in American foreign policy. Overall, this was not the issue on which the 1994 election turned, and was indeed of limited salience for the bulk of the electorate according to most polls. This was symbolised by the Republican Party's 'Contract with America', a quasi-manifesto issued six weeks before the election. Of its ten major proposals, only one addressed American relations with the rest of the world directly, and this was primarily concerned with limiting American cooperation with the UN and expanding NATO.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, once the new Republican majority in Congress took office, Congressional Republicans made some forays into foreign policy that led to confrontations with the White House. The significance of this event was widely recognised at the time, and this judgement has been subsequently confirmed by scholars working with the benefit of hindsight. Dueck, in his study of the Republican Party's foreign policy positions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, concurs, arguing that "the Republican Party in 1995-96 clearly pulled Clinton to the right on foreign and military issues as well as domestic policy."<sup>47</sup> Chollet and Goldgeier also argue that the result of the 1994 mid-term elections had "profound" consequences for American foreign policy,<sup>48</sup> while Hyland argues that the results of the 1994 election were a "disaster" for Clinton, which forced him to engage in daily battles with the newly-elected legislature.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For example, see: Majorie Connelly, 'The 1994 Elections; Portrait of the Electorate: Who Voted for Whom in the House', *The New York Times*, 13 November 1994; Robert J. Samuelson, 'Changing the Mainstream', *The Washington Post*, 30 November 1994

<sup>45</sup> The U.S. Senate has 100 voting members; the House of Representatives has 435. In common with many other political systems, legislation must pass both chambers to become law.

<sup>46</sup> Derek Chollet & James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2008), p.87-8

<sup>47</sup> Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.260

<sup>48</sup> Chollet & Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars* p.108

<sup>49</sup> William G. Hyland, *Clinton's World: Remaking American Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), p.138



Aside from the major shift in the balance of the two main parties in Congress, the 1994 election was particularly significant for two interconnected reasons: the new generation of Republicans was both highly conservative (Rockman dubbed them “hyperconservative”<sup>50</sup>) and less inclined to cooperate with the Democratic White House. There is considerable evidence that attests that the divisions between the two branches in this era were more than an inevitable conflict between two functionally-different power centres with overlapping competencies, but also had much to do with a mixture of partisan politics and visceral ideological conflict. Walter Russell Meade, for instance, argues that “The classic institutional struggle between the executive and legislative branches in American politics was exacerbated and embittered when insurgent Republicans, many with strong Jacksonian leanings, took control of Congress in 1994.”<sup>51</sup> Dueck concurs with this assessment somewhat, arguing that the new intake of Republicans were “relatively uninterested in foreign affairs and lacking in the internationalist pieties of an earlier generation.”<sup>52</sup> This fact led the historian George Herring to sum up the period as one in which “[a] band of avidly nationalistic congressional Republicans flaunted their hostility to the world.”<sup>53</sup> Dumbrell, too, in his study of Clinton’s foreign policy asserts that the Republican-dominated Congresses between 1994 and 2001 were “the most assertive and oppositional...in the American history.” Consequently, he argued that they were “a major influence over the developing trajectory over the entire Clinton foreign policy.”<sup>54</sup> In contrast, Wright argues that the end of the Cold War had the largest role to play in the demise of a bipartisan consensus in Congress and American politics at large, though he does concede that the division of the legislature and executive branches between the Republican and

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<sup>50</sup> Bert Rockman, ‘Leadership Style and the Clinton Presidency’, in Campbell & Rockman, *The Clinton Presidency*, p.343

<sup>51</sup> Walter Russell Meade, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2002), p.305

<sup>52</sup> Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.259

<sup>53</sup> George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.931

<sup>54</sup> John Dumbrell, *Clinton’s Foreign Policy: Between the Bushes, 1992-2000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.36 and 29

Democratic parties was also a major factor (especially in allowing the pro-Israeli lobby to influence the legislative process).<sup>55</sup>

The hostility towards the Clinton administration by the Republican leadership was demonstrated by two different events at the beginning of the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1995. The first of these was the opening of the inaugural hearing of the House of Representatives' International Relations Committee. The current Secretary of State is customarily invited to address the committee, but the committee passed over Warren Christopher in favour of the previous (Republican) holder of the office, James Baker. This also demonstrated somewhat the willingness of the new Republican majority to take a more activist stance in foreign policy. Although in his address to the Committee Baker cautioned them that foreign policy was a presidential prerogative,<sup>56</sup> this advice was "largely unheard – further evidence that in many ways, the old guard of Baker and [former National Security Advisor] Brent Scowcroft had fallen out of step with the angry political core of the party."<sup>57</sup> The second such incident occurred a few months later, when the senior members of Clinton's national security team (the Secretary of Defence, Secretary of State, Representative to the UN, National Security Advisor and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) travelled in person to Capitol Hill to meet with Newt Gingrich (the new Republican Speaker of the House) and the rest of the Republican Congressional leadership to brief them on current policy. The legislators did not show up for the meeting.<sup>58</sup>

Admittedly, the bulk of the new crop of legislators was not focused obsessively on foreign affairs. Nonetheless, this relative lack of interest was paired with the streak of fierce, parochial nationalism noted by Herring, so much so that Dueck also argues that the consequence of this was that, of the different foreign policy discourses within the Republican Party at the time, 'conservative

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<sup>55</sup> Steven Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security: The Foundations of the War on Terror* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2007), p.106

<sup>56</sup> Crabb, Antizzo & Sarieddine, *Congress and the Foreign Policy Process*, p.50

<sup>57</sup> Chollet & Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, p.111

<sup>58</sup> Chollet & Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, p.111; Jack F Matlock, Jr., *Superpower Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray – And How to Return to Reality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), p.185

nationalism' was predominant amongst both the party's political base and its members of Congress.<sup>59</sup> Dueck describes this 'conservative nationalism' as being focused on "the preservation of national sovereignty and an unyielding approach to foreign adversaries." Consequently, they expressed distaste for multilateral approaches and institutions and "demanded a hard line against anti-American autocrats in Cuba, North Korea, Iraq, and Iran."<sup>60</sup> While this was the most widely-held attitude amongst Republican Senators, Representatives and activists, there were also, on the fringes, 'Republican interventionists' who argued for the use of force by the US abroad, in order to assert what they perceived to be a benevolent American global hegemony, leading them to advocate "strategies of counterproliferation and regime change with regard to 'rogue states' such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea."<sup>61</sup> Dueck distinguishes these ideological strands from what he calls 'conservative realism' and 'conservative anti-interventionism'. These differ from 'conservative nationalism' and 'interventionism' in that they tend to be less concerned with moral censure and the projection of American power for idealistic ends and favour policy based on either a cold-blooded calculation of national interest or a disdain for foreign entanglements. The new Republican majority was therefore one which favoured an uncompromising, inflexible approach based on the appearance of strength and American might in the settling of disputes. Both 'nationalists' and 'interventionists' shared a strong conviction that the Clinton administration's approach and attitude towards these issues was weak and ineffectual.<sup>62</sup> Both therefore sought to use the powers of the legislative branch to either attack Clinton's foreign policies as being too soft, or to force the administration to pursue them more aggressively and unilaterally. The nationalistic tendencies and hostility of the new Republicans surprised many officials. William Perry, Secretary of Defence from 1994 to 1997, and Deputy Secretary of Defence before that, said: "1994 wasn't just a Republican takeover of Congress; it was a

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<sup>59</sup> Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.255

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.256

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.254

Contract with American takeover of Congress. I had never seen anything like the transformation of 1995.”<sup>63</sup>

One the most visible example of this was the activities of the new Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jesse Helms, a Republican from the state of North Carolina. He used his position on this committee to wage lengthy congressional battles to institute significant changes in the US relationship with the UN, holding up the payments of American dues to the organisation and demanding reforms. Citing the opportunity granted by the 1994 Republican victory, he also proposed “a radical restructuring of foreign policy apparatus”, and proposed “eliminating the Agency for International Development, the Arms Control and Development Agency, the Export-Import Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and other agencies.”<sup>64</sup> He was relatively successful in both cases. The dues were paid in return for changes at the UN and a permanent reduction in US contributions to its budget, as well as the incorporation of some previously autonomous agencies into the State Department.<sup>65</sup> At one point, he delayed the appointment of 15 ambassadors in order to gain leverage in the issue of the re-organisation of USAID.<sup>66</sup> He was also one of the principal sponsors of the 1996 Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act, subsequently known as the Helms-Burton Act, which was in some ways a model for the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, in that it targeted a state deeply unpopular in the US with extra-territorial sanctions. In addition to this, the administration also suffered some defeats at the hands of congress on other multilateral issues, with some international agreements either rejected or obstructed, the most notable examples being the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocol.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Chollet & Goldgeier, *American Between the Wars*, p.111

<sup>64</sup> Steven Greenhouse, ‘Helms Seeks to Merge Foreign Policy Agencies’, *The New York Times*, 16 March 1995

<sup>65</sup> Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.262

<sup>66</sup> Sebastian Mallaby, ‘The Bullied Pulpit: A Weak Chief Executive Makes Worse Foreign Policy’, *Foreign Affairs*, 79 (2) 2000, p.4-5

<sup>67</sup> Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.260

### 7.3.2 Congress after the Cold War

Regarding the decade immediately after the end of the Cold War, the conventional wisdom holds that with the end of superpower competition, the threshold to involvement in foreign affairs was now lower, and legislators were now arguably freer to challenge the executive without fear of appearing unpatriotic or divisive.<sup>68</sup> The death of the Soviet threat also arguably made room for new enemies and new causes to climb the agenda in American foreign policy, and occupy the attention of legislators. Some therefore argue that the end of the Cold War “expanded the sanctions agenda of Congress to a new range of issues, such as nuclear testing, environmental protection, and religious persecution. It also removed many of the inhibitions regarding the costs of alliance confrontations on national security.”<sup>69</sup> There may be something in this, but the idea that there ever was a ‘bipartisan consensus’, or an agreement between the executive and legislative branches not to ‘rock the boat’ during the Cold War is itself a myth, as history has shown.<sup>70</sup> The findings of a study by Wittkopf and McCormick also suggests that the effect of the end of the Cold War was somewhat exaggerated in terms of the absolute level of congressional activism, but that this decade continued the post-Vietnam trend of increased Congressional involvement in foreign affairs.<sup>71</sup> Others argue that the end of the Cold War has seen a corresponding decline of public interest in foreign affairs, further empowering interest groups and driving more congressional activism by incentivising legislators to pay more attention to these groups in the absence of strong national public perspectives on foreign policy issues.<sup>72</sup>

The relationship between the end of the Cold War and any changes in Congressional activity in foreign policy is complex, though there was a shift in

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<sup>68</sup> Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of US Foreign Policy*, p.32

<sup>69</sup> Kenneth Rodman, *Sanctions Beyond Borders: Multinational Corporations and U.S. Economic Statecraft* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield, 2001), p.175

<sup>70</sup> I am indebted to Mr. Stephen Rademaker for pointing this out. Interview with Stephen Rademaker, former Chief Counsel to House Committee on International Relations, Washington, D.C., 23-02-2011

<sup>71</sup> Eugene Wittkopf & James McCormick, ‘Congress, the President, and the End of the Cold War: Has Anything Changed?’ *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 42 (4) 1998, pp.440-466

<sup>72</sup> James Lindsay, ‘Deference and Defiance: The Shifting Rhythms of Executive-Legislative Relations in Foreign Policy,’ *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 33 (3) 2003, p.535

the tone of congressional activism in the wake of the end of the Cold War that suggests a causal relationship. Sanctions in particular are perhaps the best example. In keeping with a wider trend towards greater congressional activism, the bulk of American sanctions have been imposed by Congress rather than the executive branch since the 1960s,<sup>73</sup> but the nature of these sanctions changed somewhat during the 1990s. Dual containment was by no means an isolated example, in terms of the imposition of sanctions on specific states. Aside from Libya, Iran, and Iraq, the US introduced or tightened sanctions on Cuba, Nigeria, Sudan and Burma in the 1990s,<sup>74</sup> and following the nuclear tests of 1998, India and Pakistan (the Glenn Amendment to the Arms Export Control Act, and revised again in 1999).<sup>75</sup> The issue of American sanctions on foreign states and companies became a subject of fierce debate in this period, with some accusing the Congress in particular of the excessive use of ineffectual economic sanctions that served only to exclude US businesses from lucrative markets without changing the behaviour of sanctioned states: “The current inventory of US sanctions covers 26 target countries, accounting for over half the world’s population. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, Congress has felt freer to interfere in foreign policy, instructing the president on the minute details of imposing and waiving sanctions.”<sup>76</sup> This sparked attempts at rebuttals from, amongst others, Senator Jesse Helms, who disputed these figures, and argued that sanctions were a necessary price to pay for the pursuit of a “moral foreign policy.”<sup>77</sup> The issue of the kind of sanctions is also important, as they can range from full embargoes to restrictions on the import or export of a single product or commodity, and for a host of reasons, as Sullivan points out.<sup>78</sup> If Sullivan’s definition of sanctions is accepted, a deliberately median position defining sanctions as “the deliberate withdrawal of normal trade or financial relations for

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<sup>73</sup> Gary Hufbauer, Jeffrey Schott, Kimberly Elliott, Barbara Oedd, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2007), fig. 5.4, p.135

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p.126

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p.134

<sup>76</sup> Gary Hufbauer, ‘The Snake Oil of Diplomacy: When Sanctions Rise, the U.S. Peddles Sanctions’, *Washington Post*, 12 July 1998. See also Richard Haass, ‘Sanctioning Madness,’ *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (6) 1997, pp.74-85

<sup>77</sup> Jesse Helms, ‘What Sanctions Epidemic? U.S. Business’ Curious Crusade,’ *Foreign Affairs*, 78 (2) 1999, p.7

<sup>78</sup> Meghan O’Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions: Statecraft and State Sponsors of Terrorism*, p.12

foreign policy purposes”, a statistical breakdown of American sanctions imposed during the 1990s reveals complex picture that falls between the black-and-white positions drawn by the opposing sides: a sharp spike in new sanctions imposed at the beginning of the 1990s, followed by a decline in the second half of the decade.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, the evidence does support a case for increased congressional activism, as “congressionally legislated sanctions – once a rarity – became as common as their counterparts mandated by the executive branch.”<sup>80</sup> If multilateral sanctions are factored out, leaving only unilateral American sanctions, the picture is even starker, with twice as many sanctions of congressional origin than those from the executive branch.<sup>81</sup> The nature of some of these sanctions is arguably also significant in and of themselves: “Congress is most interventionist when it passes a stand-alone law targeting a specific country, exemplified by the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 and the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act of 1996.” In this category, sanctions of this nature were more numerous in the 1990s than any previous decade.<sup>82</sup>

## **7.4 The impact of Congressional activism on dual containment**

Given the presence of a hostile Republican majority in Congress, the administration was compelled to modify its policies and/or deal with congressional legislation that sought to influence foreign affairs. As we saw in Chapter 5, several pieces of legislation regarding Iran and Iraq reached the statute book in the US during the Clinton administration that began life in Congress rather than the White House. The case of Iran is the most glaring example of this. As the US had recently fought a large-scale conventional ground war against Iraq and was committed to containing it with military force, it therefore made more sense to seek to control the terms it could engage with the outside world through a comprehensive containment and sanctions regime. Iran, on the other hand, was already the target of strict and comprehensive American sanctions, which were tightened as time went by, without the same risk of the

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<sup>79</sup> O’Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, p.12

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p.12, note 5

<sup>82</sup> Hufbauer et al, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, p.134-5

resumption of military threat to American interests. Pollack argues that Iran in particular represented an opportunity for Congress to attack the White House: “Just as America was inevitably a political football in Tehran, so beginning in 1995, Iran became a political football in America. The new Republican-controlled Congress knew a good issue when they saw one.”<sup>83</sup> It is, of course, unclear that the administration would have acted differently if not for congressional pressure, but considerable evidence exists that it was a major factor. Although ‘dual containment’ was formulated and announced by executive branch officials, the administration showed every sign of carrying on with the previous regime until it was prodded into action by Congress. In Pollack’s words, towards the beginning of Clinton’s term in office, dual containment was “principally a defensive strategy, not an offensive one”, and “more declaratory than operational.”<sup>84</sup> This began to change when the US-based oil company Conoco signed a development deal with the government of Iran in early 1995. It was only when an outcry against the deal was raised by legislators that the administration chose to intervene, using national security legislation to veto the project. This view is also shared by Fields, who also argues that Clinton changed course because of domestic political pressure.<sup>85</sup> The fact that the White House was aware of the deal but chose not to intervene lends credence to this view, whether the motives were to assist American businesses abroad or otherwise.<sup>86</sup> Alikhani argues that Clinton was forced to take a stance on the issue once it went public, and he faced pressure from “Republican congressional leaders and the Jewish lobby in the United States”, even though “the Departments of Commerce, Defense, Energy and the Treasury were against any change of policy towards Iran”.<sup>87</sup> This is even more plausible in light of the fact that the White House’s initial response was also to stop the deal, but in a way that “American companies would still be permitted to buy oil from Iran and to

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<sup>83</sup> Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York, NY; Random House, 2004), p.270

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p.263

<sup>85</sup> Jeffrey Fields, *Adversaries and Statecraft: Explaining U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Rogue States*, PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2007, p.155

<sup>86</sup> David Sanger, ‘Conoco Told U.S. Years Ago of Oil Negotiations With Iran’, *The New York Times*, 16 March 1995

<sup>87</sup> Hossein Alikhani, *Sanctioning Iran: Anatomy of a Failed Policy* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), p.182



resell it to third countries, a practice that account[ed] for one-fourth of the oil sold by Iran.”<sup>88</sup>

As noted in chapter 5, this process was begun by the tabling of a bill by Senator Alfonse D’Amato, a Republican from the state of New York, who had become chairman of the Senate Banking Committee after the 1994 Republican victory. He introduced the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Act to the Senate in January of 1995, which called for the ban of all US-Iranian trade. President Clinton subsequently introduced Executive Order 12957 in mid-March 1995, which prohibited American firms and citizens from investing in the Iranian petroleum sector. This was not enough to assuage D’Amato, and the process was repeated. He proposed another Senate bill later that same month, this time extending sanctions to foreign firms that traded with Iran: the Iran Foreign Sanctions Act. This once again prompted Clinton to introduce another Executive Order, 12959, which finally achieved the objectives Senator D’Amato sought in his original bill, the closing down of virtually all formal US-Iranian trade. Again, Clinton’s efforts were not successful in satisfying Senator D’Amato and the supporters of his bills in the House and Senate. D’Amato’s second Bill became law as the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 in the face of opposition from the White House.

This was the legislation that caused the most trouble for the Clinton administration with US allies, given that it mandated sanctions on foreign companies that traded with Iran, even those based in close US allies, such as the European Union member states, Canada and Japan.<sup>89</sup> In that sense it was both a unilateral measure and also a veto of any possibility of a multilateral approach to Iran. This was one of the reasons it was so disliked by the executive branch- it was believed that it impinged on the presidential prerogative in foreign policy, first by compelling the President to take action when he had previous declined to

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<sup>88</sup> Douglas Jehl, ‘Oil Concern Ends A Deal With Iran As President Acts,’ *The New York Times*, 14 March 1995

<sup>89</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p.129-130; Ali Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Roots of Mistrust* (London: Hurst & Co., 2006), p.144

do so, and secondly by restricting his options in policymaking. It is not unreasonable to suggest that one of the reasons it met with a favourable response in both houses of Congress was that it conformed to the principles favoured by the new Republican majority - it mandated a unilateral, hard-line approach and ignored the effects this would have on existing relationships with other US allies. As Rodman argues, “much of the new class of Republican freshmen and their leaders were more aligned with the social and ideological agendas behind sanctions efforts than they were with the views of the business community and foreign policy establishment.”<sup>90</sup> As Wright points out, this also endangered the international goodwill required for the multilateral approach the administration was relying on to contain Iraq.<sup>91</sup>

In addition, there were congressional moves to overturn or undermine the stated US policy of not seeking ‘regime change’ in Iran. Executive branch officials stated on many occasions that official US policy was not to overthrow the Iranian government as it was currently constituted, or alter its system of government. Instead, “Iran... was to be contained within a *cordon sanitaire*, within which Iran could do as it pleased as long as it did not bother anyone else.”<sup>92</sup> Despite this, the Speaker of the House, Representative Newt Gingrich, “recognised that, given the popular antipathies to Iran, the Democrats were vulnerable to charges that they were not being active enough in trying to change Iran’s roguish behavior.”<sup>93</sup> He subsequently attempted to appropriate funds for a programme of covert action aimed at ‘regime change’ in what became a damaging row with the executive branch during the annual budgeting process for intelligence activities. Although this was supposed to be a confidential matter it swiftly became public, and worsened the already antagonistic relationship between the two states given that the legacy of bitterness in Iran from the involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in the downfall of Iranian Prime Minister Mossadeq in 1953. The actual sum of money involved was relatively marginal, a mere \$18m in a \$28bn intelligence funding bill for FY1996, and it is

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<sup>90</sup> Rodman, *Sanctions Beyond Borders*, p.176

<sup>91</sup> Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security*, p.113

<sup>92</sup> Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, p.136

<sup>93</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, p.273

likely that all parties involved on the American side recognised that it was unlikely to lead to a repeat of the events of 1953.<sup>94</sup> As discussed in chapter 5, although the executive branch was able to negotiate some leeway on the conditions on which the money would be spent, this was a fact wasted on the government of Iran, who announced that they would appropriate an equal amount to counteract these efforts and publicise American interference in Iranian affairs.

The Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 proved to be equally contentious. As discussed in Chapter 5, President Clinton had authorized covert attempts by the CIA to overthrow Saddam Hussein upon entering office, but held back from more overt attempts to topple him, preferring the lower-risk strategy of multilateral sanctions and economic pressure. This was not enough for some legislators, who sought to turn up the heat on both Iraq and President Clinton by seeking to make 'regime change' official US policy. The process of the passage of the ILA paralleled Gingrich's attempts to allocate funds for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran in some respects: it was widely criticised by many officials, experts and observers as unfeasible,<sup>95</sup> and the funds were channelled away from operational use by the White House. Congress was less successful in the case of Iraq because of the differing containment regimes of Iran and Iraq, which in the case of Iraq, which was far more militarised. The means to implement this policy, the military and the intelligence services, were controlled directly by the executive branch. The sanctions regime on Iraq was also a multilateral undertaking, and the White House's domination of diplomacy meant that there were no dramatic changes in the American position at the UN. Overall, Congress was poorly placed to attempt to direct American policy towards Iraq.

Arguably, the legislative measures on Iran and Iraq imposed by Congress did not lead to major, visible changes in US policy, and the White House did its best to evade the implementation of them. However, their passage had a more

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<sup>94</sup> R. Jeffrey Smith, 'U.S. Leans Towards Tighter Iran Sanctions; Administration Willing To Work With GOP On Curtailing Foreign Trade,' *The Washington Post*, 10 November 1995; Reuters, 'Gingrich 'Seeks to topple Iranian regime'' *The Australian*, 12 December 1995

<sup>95</sup> For instance, see: Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack & Gideon Rose, 'The Rollback Fantasy,' *Foreign Affairs*, 78 (1) 1999, pp.24-41

subtle implication, alluded to previously, which set the scene for a possible struggle for the direction of policy between the two branches. In effect, they went some way towards placing American policy towards these two states on a legislative footing, rather than one dictated by the White House. In the case of ILSA and policy towards Iran, the difference between Executive Orders and acts of congress is the significant point. Although they are imposed under authority granted to the president by legislation (in the case of the executive orders the International Emergency Economic Powers Act),<sup>96</sup> the former are imposed by the president and can be removed the president, at the discretion of the occupant of the White House. The latter, as legislation, requires congress to overturn using more legislation. While the president can request that Congress strike out the legislation once it is passed, it is under no formal obligation to do so. In theory, legislation can therefore 'lock in' the president to a Congressional policy if congressional sanctions are the issue around which define the trajectory of a policy, or act as an effective veto on its pursuit. In this case, the lifting of sanctions on Iran would arguably be a necessary step in reaching an accord with Iran, or a precondition for a serious dialogue.<sup>97</sup>

In practice, the situation is of course somewhat murkier. How pliable Congress would be to executive persuasion is a difficult thing to gauge, given the fact that Congressional vs. presidential control of an issue is ultimately determined by political contestation, as Corwin observed.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, in the case of ILSA, the executive branch was able to negotiate sufficient leeway to be able to avoid applying any sanctions, and avoid a clash with American allies in the EU in particular,<sup>99</sup> though in the next chapter, we shall see how the move away from sanctions was facilitated by the changing balance of power within Congress and the interest groups seeking to influence policy, taking some of the pressure off the White House. However, the transfer of more sanctions from the executive to the legislative shifted the centre of gravity of the issue of American

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<sup>96</sup> For details, see the text of the orders at <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/12957.pdf> and <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/12959.pdf> accessed 29-01-2013

<sup>97</sup> O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, p.98

<sup>98</sup> Lindsay, 'Deference and Defiance,' p.532

<sup>99</sup> Rodman, *Sanctions Beyond Borders*, p.184-5

relations with Iran in the direction of the legislature, in so far as sanctions on Iran remained a defining factor in the relations between the two states. Brzezinski argued that the imposition of the sanctions made an opening to Iran “virtually impossible,” narrowing President Clinton’s policy options.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, it served as notice that the president needed to pursue a harder line with Iran, and therefore likely had an impact on President Clinton’s approach to the issue, especially given that he was facing re-election in 1996, and his political advisors wanted “to avoid being outflanked by Senator D’Amato with Jewish-American voters in particular.”<sup>101</sup>

The question of how far Congressional sanctions narrowed President Clinton’s policy options, as Brzezinski claims, has an Iranian dimension as well as a domestic American one, making it doubly hard to judge. The effect of Congressional sanctions on US-Iranian relations is therefore determined partly by their effectiveness in their intended objective of putting economic pressure on Iran, and the closely-connected issue of the impact of this on attitudes to the US amongst influential Iranian policymakers. ILSA was originally intended to put pressure on Iran’s attempts to develop its oil industry, which was facing the problem of static production and growing domestic demand.<sup>102</sup> Choking off attempts to enlist the needed international investment in Iran’s energy sector would therefore force Iran to confront a stark and unpleasant choice between severe economic strain or complying with US demands. Economically, the evidence of the effects of the imposition of Clinton’s two executive orders and ILSA is somewhat mixed. While Iran was able to continue to export oil in significant amounts, and was able to continue to secure international partners in oil and gas development projects (especially after waiving sanctions on the deal between the National Iranian Oil Company and Gazprom, Total and Petronas in 1998), the indirect effect of the sanctions may have been more significant,<sup>103</sup> and

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<sup>100</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2007), p.102

<sup>101</sup> Ernest Preeg, *Feeling Good or Doing Good with Sanctions: Unilateral Economic Sanctions and the U.S. National Interest* (Washington, DC: The CSIS Press, 1999), p.54

<sup>102</sup> Weissman interview

<sup>103</sup> Hossein Askari, John Forrer, Hildy Teegan, Jiawen Yang, *Case Studies of U.S. Economic Sanctions: The Chinese, Cuban, and Iranian Experience* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), p.172.

stem from “higher financing costs, retarded or stalled oil and non-oil joint venture projects (which, in turn, have impeded oil capacity development and thus possibly reduced oil production and oil exports), and the like.”<sup>104</sup> The Iranian government apparently signalled that it regarded the removal of sanctions as a pre-condition for improved relations with the US in 1998, at the beginning of the tentative attempts at reconciliation initiated after the election of Khatami.<sup>105</sup> In political terms, the imposition of further sanctions on Iran cannot therefore have had a positive impact on Iranian calculations of the desirability of restoring diplomatic links with the US, though the subsequent missed opportunities to improve US-Iranian ties after the election of Khatami may have had as much (if not more) to do with internal power struggles than the demand for the lifting of sanctions before negotiations could begin.<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless, as O’Sullivan argues, “[a]ccording to most Iranian political leaders, regardless of their political leanings, as long as sanctions remain in place, Iran will reject any official dialogue with the United States.”<sup>107</sup> In all probability they were an important factor, given significance of the relationship with the US in Iranian domestic politics and the centrality of oil exports to the Iranian economy. The result of all of this is that the issue of the congressional ability to veto a process of reconciliation between Iran and the US was deferred, not resolved as the point at which this would have been tested was never reached.

## 7.5 Conclusions

Following the experience of Vietnam and Watergate, the US Congress sought to reign in the foreign policy powers of the executive branch and re-assert the Congressional control and oversight of American foreign relations granted by the constitution. This led to a number of structural reforms within the institution to both enhance its own power and widen participation in policy-making. This also had effect of making congress more receptive to interest groups seeking to

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<sup>104</sup> Askari et al, *Case Studies of US Economic Sanctions*, p.211

<sup>105</sup> ‘Iran Pointer to Better US Ties,’ *Financial Times*, 30 September 1998

<sup>106</sup> Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, p.177-8

<sup>107</sup> O’Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, p.47

influence policy. These would have serious implications for American policy in the Persian Gulf in the 1990s.

Consequently, the institutional context in which ‘dual containment’ was formulated proved to be a strong influence on the evolution of the policy. The necessity of taking Congressional pressure to further isolate Iran and Iraq into account complicated administration policy, and to some small degree altered its direction also. While no sanctions were imposed on companies trading with Iran, the outcry over the links between the US and Iran led to the banning of virtually all trade between the two states, and succeeded in burying Rafsanjani’s overture in the Conoco affair, though this was also viewed with suspicion amongst several policymakers in the executive branch. While American overtures to Khatami eventually proved fruitless, and improvement in the relationship between the US and Iran would have doubtless required the removal of American sanctions on Iran at some point. One of the effects of the sanctions legislation would have been to give Congress a voice in this decision. It is impossible to know what the outcome of congressional-executive negotiations on this issue, but by itself it demonstrates the influence of Congress on the foreign policy process. Ultimately, although the real limits of its power were never tested, Congress was successful at putting its ‘stamp’ on dual containment, demonstrating the importance of the domestic institutional context in American foreign policymaking.

More difficult to measure is the impact of Congressional influence on a less overt, informal level, on the judgements of key policymakers, including President Clinton himself. President Clinton did attempt to build links with Iran following the election of Khatami, despite knowing how unpopular Iran was with legislators, which suggests that he believed he had sufficient political capital and influence with Congress to follow through on his ambitions if the response had been positive. However, this is not the only variable at work, as we shall see in the next chapter. The next chapter examines the impact of ‘policy coalitions’ of dual containment, and the attempts of various interest groups to shape American policy in the Persian Gulf, especially towards Iran.

Overall, Congress was able to influence the implementation of dual containment in ways that manifested the 'separation of powers' between the branches with regards to foreign affairs. In seeking to legislate sanctions on Iran (and to some degree Iraq, with the ILA), Congress sought to impose limits and boundaries upon the president. Conversely, President Clinton used the powers and prerogatives of his office to maximise his freedom of action within these boundaries, and to some degree shift them as much as possible, in a process that has been reflected time and again in American politics.



## **CHAPTER 8 Interest groups as an intervening variable: 'Mischiefs of Faction'?**

“AIPAC by its very nature is focused on Capitol Hill, Congress...when Sy Kenen founded AIPAC he said ‘our job is to get the Senate to tell the President to order the State Department to stop beating up Israel.’”<sup>1</sup>

The previous chapter focused primarily on the impact of ‘domestic institutions,’ examining the institutional context in which dual containment policy was made. While this is an important factor in understanding American foreign policy, it cannot tell the whole story. This chapter plays a complementary role, and looks at how interest groups originating within society at large interact with these structures to shape and influence dual containment. It examines the role of ‘policy coalitions,’ those constellations of forces within a society that use political influence to affect policy in different ways, in a manner determined both by their own ability to do this (based on factors like the skill of their advocates, public support, and so on), and the opportunities offered to them by the political system in which they operate. Specifically, organised interest groups espousing a variety of causes and interests frequently seek to insert their preferences and policies into the policymaking process by lobbying legislators and executive branch officials. While the institutional context of the state in which they operate determines how effective they can be (depending on the relative autonomy of the FPE and the accessibility of the policymaking process to outside interest groups), it is the degree of influence these forces wield and the nature of their preferred policies that determine specific outcomes. In the American case, interest groups are able to influence policy despite holding no formal power, by lobbying legislators and officials, though their influence varies from issue to issue and from group to group.

This chapter argues that pro-Israeli lobbyists, specifically AIPAC, were successful in lobbying Congress to tighten the already stringent American

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Rosen, former AIPAC official, interview with author, Silver Springs, Maryland, US, March 2012

sanctions regime on Iran, and in so doing were able to place some indirect pressure on the executive branch to pursue a 'hardline' policy towards Iran. AIPAC was not, however, an all-powerful force in determining American policy. While it, and some organisations like it, possesses considerable influence in the making of foreign policy in some respects, this depends almost entirely on certain conditions being met. This is demonstrated by the failure of opponents of the sanctions, and of an antagonistic approach to Iran more generally, to make much headway in their attempts to challenge this trend in American policy, though they saw some success in moderating American sanctions policy. The course of dual containment therefore reflected the results of contestation amongst interest groups, as it did the perceptions of policymakers and the institutional context in which it was conceived and implemented.

This chapter examines the role of interest groups pushing for the imposition of sanctions on Iran and the implementation of measures like the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act and the Iran Missile Proliferation Sanctions Act. The passage of this legislation is commonly attributed to the influence of the so-called the 'Israel lobby,' and sometimes the antagonistic approach of American policy towards Iran more generally.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, we will therefore attempt to determine the extent to which pro-Israeli lobbying organisations like AIPAC were able to influence legislative measures targeting Iran with sanctions, and indirectly the trajectory of American policy towards Iran more generally. This will be preceded by an exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of this approach to the study of foreign policymaking, and how this fits in with the wider framework of neoclassical realism (NCR) as it is utilised in this thesis as a whole. This is followed by an examination of the nature of this lobby and attempt to draw an accurate picture of its power and influence, despite the controversies that have dogged it and determine if, as Smith alleges, American sanctions on Iran came about "in substantial part at the insistence of ethnic lobbies."<sup>3</sup> The insistence of Parsi, and some other scholars, on the importance of

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, in Hossein Alikhani's *Sanctioning Iran: Anatomy of a Failed Policy* (London: IB Tauris, 2000)

<sup>3</sup> Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.16.

Israel and its allies in the US on the American approach to Iran, also makes this a pressing issue that must be examined closely. The reasons why the pro-Israeli lobby is regarded as so influential in American policymaking is also discussed. This is followed by an examination of rival interest groups that attempted to counteract its effects, and the comparison of their influence with their opponents in the pro-Israel lobby.

## 8.1 Interest groups, foreign policy and neoclassical realism

The role of interest groups in American politics and foreign policy has been debated since the foundation of the US as part of wider debates about the pros and cons of democratic government. A good definition of an interest group (which he termed a 'faction') was given by James Madison in *The Federalist Papers*, and is arguably still valid today: "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community."<sup>4</sup> In chapter 2, we explored how some neoclassical realists viewed legislatures as one version of an 'interest group.'<sup>5</sup> It is a feature of the American political system that the Congress is able to play this role, and simultaneously that of a significant part of the policymaking system which is itself open to lobbying by interest groups in society. While the executive branch is generally the single most influential actor in determining the course of American foreign policy, Congress also retains an influential role, and Congress can in turn be strongly influenced by public opinion and organised interest groups. This chapter therefore seeks to examine the role of interest groups seeking to use their influence with Congress to shape American foreign policy.

The impact of domestic interest groups within states on the formation of foreign policy has been largely passed over by NCR theorists, whom, to date,

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<sup>4</sup> James Madison, 'The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection' *The Federalist*, no.10, 1787, available at <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm> accessed 28-05-2012

<sup>5</sup> Norrin Ripsman, 'Neoclassical realism and domestic interest groups,' in Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman and Jeffrey Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

have been less concerned with individual foreign policies like dual containment and (in general) more concerned with ‘grand strategy,’ which of necessity focuses less on the narrower agendas typically pushed by interest groups. This chapter therefore has fewer precedents in regards to NCR theory, because it examines the role of interest groups seeking to influence a specific foreign policy in a specific state, the US, and largely by lobbying Congress. Consequently, this chapter draws more upon the research into the role of interest groups, particularly ethnic interest groups, on American politics and foreign policy from FPA and Political Science, though it remains rooted in NCR. Among the NCR scholars who focus on interest groups based in society are Lobell, who theorises about the role of competition between domestic and export-focused economic interest groups in foreign policy formation, but is a partial exception, given his focus on larger forces.<sup>6</sup> The work of Ripsman is a more direct precedent, as he has also sought to study the role of interest groups on foreign policy more generally, though his definition of interest groups is more extensive. Nonetheless, he theorizes that interest groups based within society (rather than the government) can influence foreign policy if they are “well-organized, coherent, vote-rich, single-issue interest groups that can provide an electoral payoff” to leaders. This chapter argues that the pro-Israel lobby strongly resembles Ripsman’s picture.

Debates about the role of interest groups in American politics in general and in foreign policy specifically have a long pedigree. In regards to foreign policy, those who have engaged in this debate share a tendency to take one of two different sides. On the one hand, there are those who lament the role of interest groups, especially ethnic interest groups, in the making of American foreign policy, arguing that they have in recent years become too powerful and have made it more difficult for the government to make foreign policy in a disinterested and objective fashion, especially since the end of the Cold War.<sup>7</sup> Huntington, for example, argued in 1997, that “Without a sure sense of national

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<sup>6</sup> Steven Lobell, ‘Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model,’ in Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, the States, and Foreign Policy*

<sup>7</sup> For example, see George Kennan, *The Cloud of Danger: Some Current Problems of American Foreign Policy* (London: Hutchinson, 1977); Charles Matthias, ‘Ethnic Groups and Foreign Policy’, *Foreign Affairs*, 59 (5) 1991-2, pp.975-998; Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.2

identity, Americans have become unable to define their national interests, and as a result subnational commercial interests and transnational and non-national ethnic interests have come to dominate foreign policy.”<sup>8</sup> On the other, there are those, like Milbrath, who concluded that interest groups are relatively unimportant.<sup>9</sup> As stated above, an important element is the nature of the American political system, which is highly pluralistic and provides fertile ground for interest groups to flourish. These debates are also complicated by the issue of the position taken by interlocutors on where the bulk of the power and responsibility for forming foreign policy should lie, the executive or legislative branch, given that the former is usually held to be more insulated from social pressures. Engaging in these debates in a comprehensive way is beyond the scope of this work, which is in any case focused on different goals. Nonetheless, we can conclude that the fact that these debates occur and reoccur in American politics indicates that interest groups have influence enough in some ways to attract the attention of scholars and policymakers. Madison, one of the architects of the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights, warned of the dangers posed to democracy by the “mischiefs of faction” but accepted that these were inevitable in a democratic system.<sup>10</sup> More recent scholarship suggests that ethnic interest groups have some influence, but no more than other kinds of group, such as “the media, business groups, and nonelected elites”, and in many cases less.<sup>11</sup> The question becomes, therefore, why are some interest groups more influential than others?

While no interest group, representing an ethnicity, single-issue campaign group, industry (such as aerospace, oil, or mining and so on) or other sector of society enjoys ‘power’ per se, the fact that they represent genuine citizens or businesses gives them a varying amount of influence with legislators and

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Huntington, ‘The Erosion of American National Interests’, *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (5) 1997, p.29

<sup>9</sup> Lester Milbrath, ‘Interest Groups and Foreign Policy,’ in James Rosenau (ed.), *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (London: Free Press, 1967)

<sup>10</sup> James Madison, ‘The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection’

<sup>11</sup> David Paul & Rachel Paul, *Ethnic Lobbies & US Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2009), p.203

officials, who are more-or-less inclined to listen to them for a host of reasons.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, when an interest group is described as ‘powerful,’ what this generally means is that its views are taken seriously by the government figures it seeks to influence, and that this has an impact on their formation of policy as a result. Admittedly, this is a very difficult thing to measure, and “Such an approach may lead to fallacious conclusions concerning the power and influence of a group or to the problem of “parallelism” (that is, of attributing influence to a group based on a set of factors and influences unrelated to anything that group has or has not done.”<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, this is an important area that deserves serious and sustained attention. As other scholars have argued, the interplay of such nebulous factors is an extremely important part of the day-to-day politics in which policy is made, much of which takes place in an informal manner and out of the public eye.<sup>14</sup>

For scholars of international relations, this begs a question: why focus in particular on Congress and domestic interest groups, particularly those represented by lobbyists, when “the number of nongovernmental factors that can shape a society’s foreign policy is staggering and, accordingly, the task of piecing them together into a coherent whole is extraordinarily complex”?<sup>15</sup> The question of Congress has been answered above and in the previous chapter, but bears repeating: the US Congress is almost unique in its formal power over foreign policymaking. The attention given to lobbying groups in this chapter is somewhat more problematic, given that much attention has also been given to the role of other groups and factors, such as the media, public opinion and so on, especially within the subfield of FPA. This too, however, can be explained. As stated in the previous chapter, it is somewhat misleading to speak of Congress as a single unitary body, with a cohesive policy of its own. Aside from the fact that it is composed of two houses, the House of Representatives and the Senate,

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Watanabe, *Ethnic Groups, Congress, and American Foreign Policy: The Politics of the Turkish Arms Embargo* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), p.21-22

<sup>13</sup> David Howard Goldberg, *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups: American and Canadian Jews Lobby for Israel* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), p.11

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Hersman, *Friends and Foes: How Congress and the President Really Make Foreign Policy*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p.3-5

<sup>15</sup> James Rosenau, ‘Introduction’, *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (London: Free Press, 1967) p.4

which may be controlled by different parties at any one time (and may not see eye-to-eye on any given issue in any case given their differing institutional perspectives), both are composed of groups of individuals operating under a weak party system. Each attempt by the legislature to force the executive to change its policy, or to accept one from Congress, must therefore begin with a single legislator, or group.

This stands in contrast to a view expressed by scholars who have argued that domestic interest groups and Congress have little direct influence on foreign policy. Milbrath, for instance, writing in the mid-1960s, concluded that the president dominated the foreign-policymaking process, and that the most effective way for interest groups to affect policy was to capture his attention.<sup>16</sup> Milbrath dismisses the powers of Congress as ones to set limits on the power of the president, but not to intervene directly. However, this took place before the expansion of Congressional involvement in foreign policy that took place after the Vietnam War, described in the previous chapter, when the executive branch enjoyed much more autonomy from societal pressures, and a strong Cold War consensus existed.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, despite the fact that he concluded that the ability of interest groups to influence foreign policy was very limited,<sup>18</sup> Milbrath offers a useful description of the task facing interest groups seeking to influence foreign policy:

groups desiring to influence foreign policy decisions must know the optimum stage of the decision for delivery of their message; they must know the officials or their advisers who are involved in the decision and who are most likely to be receptive to the messages; they must find an open and clear channel to such persons; they must attract the attention of officials so that they will be heard; they must compose messages that are credible and legitimate. They may want to supplement these methods by stirring up messages from the grass roots or they may wish to concentrate on elites who are more likely to send supplementary messages...Lobbying to influence foreign policy is no easy matter.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> James Rosenau, 'Introduction,' *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy*, p.4

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Carter & James Scott, *Choosing to Lead: Understanding Congressional Foreign Policy Entrepreneurs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p.15

<sup>18</sup> Milbrath, 'Interest Groups and Foreign Policy,' p.25

<sup>19</sup> Milbrath, 'Interest Groups and Foreign Policy', p.244

## 8.2 The pro-Israel lobby: influence, not power

It is a widely-held belief amongst observers of American politics that the 'Israel lobby' is amongst the most powerful of the various interest groups trying to influence American government policy, with some placing it second only to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).<sup>20</sup> While the AARP claims to have a membership of almost 40 million, making it the largest such group in the US,<sup>21</sup> the groups that make up what is acknowledged to be the 'core' of the pro-Israel lobby in Washington are small in comparison, yet the belief in their potency one that persists amongst many scholars and American politicians. For instance, a survey of 'Washington insiders' conducted by Paul and Paul place it at the top of the list of ethnic interest groups in terms of influence,<sup>22</sup> leading them to conclude that "Only AIPAC has the policymaking prowess to rival organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce or the AARP."<sup>23</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt offer a reasonable definition of the boundaries of the lobby, stating that they take it to be "the loose coalition of individuals and organisations that actively work to shape US foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction."<sup>24</sup> The two organisations that make up the core of the organized pro-Israel lobby in the United States are the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations (or 'Presidents' Conference'), and the American Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC). The Presidents' Conference has traditionally maintained a lower profile, and focused on lobbying the executive branch. It is widely held to be relatively ineffective, at least in comparison to its sister organisation, though it is taken to represent (and sees itself as) the representative of the collective voice of the American Jewish community.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Alikhani, *Sanctioning Iran*, p.177

<sup>21</sup> Figured drawn from AARP official website, [http://www.aarp.org/about-aarp/press-center/info-2007/rx\\_bargaining\\_power.html](http://www.aarp.org/about-aarp/press-center/info-2007/rx_bargaining_power.html) accessed 01-06-2012; Burdett Loomis & Allan Cigler, 'Introduction: The Changing Nature of Interest Group Politics', in Allan Cigler & Burdett Loomis (eds.), *Interest Group Politics*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007), p.13

<sup>22</sup> Paul & Paul *Ethnic Lobbies & US Foreign Policy*, p.135-6

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.211

<sup>24</sup> John J. Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (NY; Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007), p.112

<sup>25</sup> Author interview with Rosen



AIPAC, on the other hand, has been at the forefront of lobbying Congress on foreign policy, and been the target of much of the criticism directed at the lobby. This stems from a perception in some quarters that it wields a disproportionate and unhealthy amount power, and has been able to pressure American policymakers into pursuing policies that are beneficial for Israel but detrimental to the US, as well as trying to delegitimise critics of Israel and its policies.<sup>26</sup> Both AIPAC and the Presidents' Conference are rooted in the Jewish American community, though in recent years some evangelical Christian groups and leaders have adopted Israel as an issue, largely from the belief that the Jewish state has a role to play in fulfilling Biblical prophecy.<sup>27</sup> It is partly for this reason that it is incorrect to refer to a 'Jewish lobby,' at least as far as the issue of the American relationship Israel and the Middle East more generally is concerned. A more important reason is the fact that Jewish Americans are not a single coherent mass that offers unflinching and unqualified support for the state of Israel on every single issue, and other Jewish groups that have clashed with AIPAC and the larger lobby have been formed (though they have not proven to be as successful in their attempts to attract support, shape debate and lobby policymakers). The most recent, and most high-profile of these groups is 'J Street.'<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, given the Jewish roots of AIPAC and the Presidents' Conference and the groups it represents, scholars usually place the 'Israel lobby' within the sub-set of 'ethnic' interest groups competing to influence policy, which includes others such as the Cuban-American and the Greek-American lobbies.<sup>29</sup>

What is nearly universally-acknowledged is the success that AIPAC and the wider lobby have enjoyed in comparison to other ethnic interest groups. Much of this stems from the fact that its members have proven to be highly skilled and professional. Paul and Paul, in their study of ethnic interest groups and American foreign policy, attest that "To most observers, and the consensus

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<sup>26</sup> The best known and most controversial is Mearsheimer and Walt. See also, George Ball & Douglas Ball, *The Passionate Attachment: America's Involvement with Israel, 1947 to the Present* (New York City, NY: WW Norton & Co., 1992)

<sup>27</sup> Ball & Ball, *The Passionate Attachment*, p.203

<sup>28</sup> See <http://jstreet.org/about> accessed 27-01-2013

<sup>29</sup> For instance Paul & Paul, *Ethnic Lobbies and U.S. Foreign Policy*

of those interviewed for this study, AIPAC is the gold standard of an effective organisation”, and that it is “routinely appraised as being the most effective ethno racial lobby in the United States.”<sup>30</sup> This view is echoed by Eric Unslaner, who states that “The best organized, best-funded, and most successful of the ethnic lobbies represents the interests of Israel. The most important ethnic lobby on foreign policy is...AIPAC.”<sup>31</sup> This high level of organisation and professionalism is manifested partly in its skill in mobilising its grass-roots members to put pressure on legislators.<sup>32</sup> It also comes across in the competency and consistency with which it carries out its direct lobbying of legislators. Many sources attest to the comprehensiveness with which AIPAC keeps track of developments in Congress and the close watch it keeps on American foreign policy towards Israel and other Middle East states. It has also been careful to cultivate links with legislators and their aides by providing them with useful research and assistance, so that it is one of the first sources they turn to for information and advice, and one of the most trusted.<sup>33</sup> As Smith argues, “[m]oney and votes alone cannot buy this kind of access, which is gained instead by patience, diligence, determination, and the time to build up infrastructures of influence- attributes that neither single individuals nor an ethnic community alone can provide but which are the hallmarks of an institutionally effective lobby.”<sup>34</sup>

The other sources of the lobby’s success that are commonly cited can be summarised as: the nature of the American political system, the depth of the lobby’s support within the Jewish-American community and American population at large, and the relative weakness of the groups that seek opposite objectives, such as Arab-Americans or oil companies. Firstly, the American

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<sup>30</sup> Paul & Paul, *Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy*, p.48 and p.107

<sup>31</sup> Eric Unslaner, ‘American Interests in the Balance: Do ethnic groups dominate policymaking?’, in Allan Cigler & Burdett Loomis (eds.), *Interest Group Politics*, 7th edition (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2007)

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell Bard, *The Water’s Edge and Beyond: Defining the Limits to Domestic Influence on United States Middle East Policy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), p.13

<sup>33</sup> Camille Mansour, *Beyond Alliance: Israel in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), translated by James Cohen, p.240-242

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.124

political system is in many ways more pluralistic and accessible to interest groups than those of many other states. This stems partly from the nature of the 'separation of powers' described in the previous chapter: Congress is unusually powerful in regards to its ability to check or override the wishes of the executive branch.<sup>35</sup> Each legislator is therefore a potentially-useful point of access to the policymaking system for interest groups hoping to influence policy, with the House of Representatives perhaps being the most accessible and most responsive to the public, as its members face election every two years and are answerable to a relatively small constituency, unlike the state-level constituency of a senator or the nation at large in the case of the president, who are elected for six and four-year terms respectively. The constituency of a Representative is therefore quite small, and a well-organised group among his or her constituents can therefore gain considerable access to their representative quite easily. The nature of the system in which interest groups operate therefore sets the 'ceiling' on what they can achieve. The relatively 'open' nature of the American political system and its institutions means that this ceiling is relatively high. This is therefore a necessary, but not sufficient condition, for an interest group (especially one that focuses on foreign policy, given its traditional monopolisation by executive-based elites) to succeed in influencing policy.

Secondly, the nature of the Jewish community in which the pro-Israel lobby is primarily based, and from which it draws much of its support, is one of the most important of the sufficient conditions that determine its level of clout. Many sources agree that Jewish Americans, considered en masse, possess political influence disproportionate to their numbers (comprising just over 2% of the population of the US as a whole), essentially through utilising as fully as possible the opportunities open to them as American citizens.<sup>36</sup> This is derived from their historically high levels of participation in the political process, both in turning out to vote in national elections in remarkably high proportions (much

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher Hill argues that it has "no rival" in this regard, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.253

<sup>36</sup> Paul & Paul, *Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy*, p.105

higher than the national average)<sup>37</sup> and in making financial contributions to political campaigns, especially to the Democratic Party.<sup>38</sup> Jewish Americans are also 'clustered' together in a manner that enhances their electoral power, in elections for both Congress and the presidency, in states that possess relatively large numbers of votes in the Electoral College, such as New York, New Jersey and California, and forming large minorities in some Congressional districts.<sup>39</sup> As Bard points out, the 10 US states with the highest Jewish populations account for 244 of the 270 Electoral College votes needed to elect a president.<sup>40</sup> Paul and Paul also argue that the demographic distribution of American Jews is unique in that while many are clustered, there are also smaller but sizeable populations in a large number of other districts, giving access to more legislators by Jewish interest groups via their constituents. This pattern is "complemented extremely well" by the population pattern of evangelical Christians, who have a strong presence in districts where there are relatively few Jews, and also tend to be pro-Israeli.<sup>41</sup> This all enhances the profile of the lobby amongst legislators and officials, and contributes towards ensuring that the organisations that make up the lobby are well-funded.

In addition, the issue of Israeli security has been a consistently important one for the American Jewish community, something which has been given an added urgency by the Holocaust, and this has acted as a catalysing element driving and sustaining popular involvement in and support for pro-Israel lobbying activity. Support for Israel and its policies became akin to a touchstone of Jewish identity in the United States following the foundation of the state in 1948, in light of the fact that the majority of American Jews have chosen not to

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<sup>37</sup> Ball & Ball, *The Passionate Attachment*, claim these figures as 90% and 40-50% respectively; Unslaner, 'American Interests in the Balance? Do Ethnic Groups Dominate Foreign Policy Making?', p.307; Mitchell Bard, 'The Influence of Ethnic Interest Groups on American Middle East Policy,' in Charles Kegley & Eugene Wittkopf (eds.), *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence* (New York, St. Martin's, 1988), p.58-9; Nimrod Novik, *The United States and Israel: Domestic Determinants of a Changing U.S. Commitment* (Boulder, CO: Westview/Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1986), p.59

<sup>38</sup> Michael Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel: The Power and Limits of Belief* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2007), p.21; Smith, *Foreign Attachments*, p.107; Mansour, *Beyond Alliance*, p.245

<sup>39</sup> Mansour, *Beyond Alliance*, p.248; Novik, *The United States and Israel*, p.58-9

<sup>40</sup> Mitchell Bard, 'The Israeli and Arab Lobbies', The Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/lobby.html#2> accessed 21-04-2012

<sup>41</sup> Paul & Paul, *Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy*, p.111

exercise their 'right of return' but instead support it from afar as a way of staying in contact with and reinforcing their identity as Jews.<sup>42</sup> Consequentially, by the 1970s it had become almost impossible to obtain a leadership position in a national Jewish organisation without espousing strong support for Israel.<sup>43</sup> The perception that Israel exists in a constant state of peril has therefore been an important part of pro-Israel solidarity amongst Jewish Americans, despite the fact that they, as individuals, hold as diverse a range of views, attitudes and policy preferences as the nation at large. As an example, many scholars and observers point to the Six-Day War of 1967 and the October War of 1973 and as important moments that led to an increase in support for Israel and financial contributions to pro-Israeli organisations like AIPAC amongst Jewish Americans.<sup>44</sup> As one observer once said, "Israel's geographic proximity to actual or potential enemies has created a "siege" mentality in which the potential exists for "American Jews to see the Middle East through the lens of genocide.""<sup>45</sup>

The fact that the pro-Israeli lobby is geared almost exclusively towards foreign policy is also a facilitating factor. This must be balanced against the traditional domination of foreign policy by the executive branch, which is less accessible to lobbying by outside groups. On the whole, the power of the legislative branch in foreign affairs, and its relative openness to lobbyists and interest groups, does much to counteract this bias, as does the nature of the 'special relationship' between the US and Israel. This has two important consequences. Firstly, lobbyists for, and supporters of, Israel can concentrate on one policy area and focus all of its efforts and resources upon it, unlike other groups who might have to focus their attention on a variety of issues, perhaps

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<sup>42</sup> Ian Bickerton, 'America's Israel/Israel's America,' in John Dumbrell & Axel Schäfer, *America's 'Special Relationships': Foreign and Domestic Aspects of the Politics of Alliance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.176; Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy* (New York: NY, Simon & Schuster, 1987), p.249

<sup>43</sup> Tivnan, *The Lobby*, p.76

<sup>44</sup> Bickerton, 'America's Israel/Israel's America', p.176; Ball & Ball, *The Passionate Attachment*, p.202-3; Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel*, p.30; Watanabe, *Ethnic Groups, Congress, and American Foreign Policy*, p.10; Bernard Reich, *Securing the Covenant: United States-Israel Relations After the Cold War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), p.68; Goldberg, *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups*, chapter 3

<sup>45</sup> Shai Franklin, quoted by Thomas Ambrosio, 'Entangling Alliances: The Turkish-Israeli Lobbying Partnership and Its Unintended Consequences', in Thomas Ambrosio (ed.), *Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), p.156

even across both the foreign and domestic policy spheres. This also gives pro-Israel lobbyists another strategic advantage in their attempts to influence American policy, as they have less need to accept compromises in the pursuit of their core mission in order to achieve other objectives. This exclusive focus also works for pro-Israel lobbyists in that it allows them wide latitude in seeking allies and in targeting their lobbying activity. Neither of the two main political parties in the US has a monopoly on support for Israel, making it very much a bipartisan issue, and AIPAC in particular seeks to cultivate ties to and engage with both Democrats and Republicans.<sup>46</sup> Within Congress itself, this removes obstacles for lobbying groups like AIPAC, who are free to cultivate legislators and officials from both parties, unlike many other interest groups. Organised labour, for instance, is essentially tied to the Democratic Party for both practical and ideological reasons, as are advocates of environmental regulation. Lobbyists for Israel are not therefore necessarily hamstrung if Congress changes hands.

The nature of the American political system and electoral process are also beneficial to single-issue lobbying groups like AIPAC in another way. The open nature of candidate selection (via 'primary' elections in most cases)<sup>47</sup> can empower narrowly-focused groups, who can make candidates' positions on their particular area of concern the deciding factor in offering their support or endorsement (although admittedly in reality many congressional candidates are unopposed in their party's primaries). This could tip the balance in a closely-contested race. Candidates taking positions that are perceived as critical of Israel, or 'pro-Arab', may therefore find themselves facing an opponent supported by the pro-Israel lobby at the primary stage, as has been reported on several occasions.<sup>48</sup> Political campaign funding reforms in the post-Watergate era have resulted in a legislative branch open to large-scale funding from interest groups, in contrast to presidential campaigns, leading to a sharp increase in the costs of political campaigns.<sup>49</sup> Candidates may also legally accept funding from

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<sup>46</sup> Bard, *The Water's Edge*; Rosen interview

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *Foreign Attachments*, p.88

<sup>48</sup> Paul Latham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia: The Reagan Administration's Competing Interests in the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), p.67

<sup>49</sup> Michael Mezey, *Congress, the President, and Public Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989) p.127

groups or individuals from outside of the constituency they seek to represent, meaning that national networks of members of interest groups can fund the campaign of a candidate 'approved' by a particular lobby. Although AIPAC, in particular, is barred from funding political campaigns as a registered lobbying organisation, it can play a coordinating and facilitating role and shares many members with groups that can,<sup>50</sup> and earning its 'seal of approval' has the potential to either greatly assist or undermine a candidate's campaign.<sup>51</sup> Its members all over the country can therefore contribute to specific political campaigns in districts far removed from their own, if they so choose, on the basis of a candidate's (or his or her opponent's) views on Israel, both in primary intra-party elections, and contests for Congressional and Senate seats. Paul and Paul conclude that, amongst America's numerous ethnic interest groups, Jewish-Americans are by far the most active within the field of contributions to candidates in this regard by a substantial margin, based on their analysis of donations by pro-Israeli political action committees (PACs). However, they also point out that donations from PACs organised around ethnic lobbies are small in both absolute and relative terms in comparison to other sources, especially business groups (though these groups rarely take a position on specific foreign policies, even oil companies with a strong presence in the Arab states, as discussed below).<sup>52</sup>

A major factor in the success of the pro-Israel lobby is also the simple fact that the American public is generally supportive of Israel,<sup>53</sup> over and above any pragmatic considerations of American national interests, with a 'default position' based instead in a "deep concern of a great part of American public opinion for the survival and prospering of this new state."<sup>54</sup> Polls show a consistently high support for Israel amongst the general populace since 1967.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ball and Ball, *The Passionate Attachment*, p.209

<sup>51</sup> Robert Dreyfuss, 'AIPAC From the Inside, Part 1: Isolating Iran', *Tehran Bureau*, PBS/Frontline, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/06/aipac-from-the-inside-1-isolating-iran.html> accessed 16-04-2012; Bernard Reich, *The United States and Israel: Influence in the Special Relationship*, (New York, NY: Praeger, 1984), p.199

<sup>52</sup> Paul and Paul, *Ethnic Lobbies & US Foreign Policy*, Chapter 3 and p.198

<sup>53</sup> Goldberg, *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups*, p.24-5

<sup>54</sup> George Kennan, *The Cloud of Danger*, p.81

<sup>55</sup> Bard, 'The Israeli and Arab Lobbies'

This gives the lobby leverage vis-à-vis legislators and officials, in addition to their own understanding of the need to reflect at least some of the public's views in policymaking. Many scholars trace this to sympathy for the Jewish people engendered by the Holocaust and reinforced by the wars and terrorist attacks Israel has experienced in its short history. Pro-Israel groups have also worked hard to highlight the links between the US and Israel, and emphasised the fact that Israel has existed as a fellow democracy surrounded by hostile dictatorships for much of its life. In contrast, many Americans have clichéd and less sympathetic views of Arabs and Iranians. Incidents that illustrate this abound, and in some instances candidates for office have refused or shunned support from Arab-American groups, even prior to Al-Qaeda's attacks on Washington DC and New York in 2001.<sup>56</sup> The size of Israel also engenders some sympathy: as a small state with a small population, it appears doubly vulnerable and therefore in need of support, as a Jewish 'David' against an Arab 'Goliath,' whatever the facts on the ground may be regarding the military superiority of Israel over its neighbours and its regional monopoly on nuclear weapons. This is not a sufficient condition to guarantee a positive view of Israel amongst the general population of the US, but it is undoubtedly a necessary one, as it would be unlikely for any interest group to successfully promote its preferred policies in the face of opposition from the public at large.<sup>57</sup> As Bard argues, "If you add the non-Jews shown by opinion polls to be as pro-Israel as Jews, it is clear Israel has the support of one of the largest veto groups in the country."<sup>58</sup>

Given the advantages and examples cited above, the pro-Israeli lobby, and in particular AIPAC, seems to conform closely to the picture painted by Ripsman of an influential interest group: single issue, organized, vote-rich, coherent and able to offer electoral benefits. It therefore arguably enjoys a great deal of *potential* influence over both individual legislators and officials, and perhaps even administrations as a whole. Politicians must make careful calculations about the electoral consequences of adopting a position that goes

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<sup>56</sup> Unslaner 'American Interests in the Balance?' in Cigler & Loomis, *Interest Group Politics*, p.306

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.310

<sup>58</sup> Bard, *The Water's Edge and Beyond*, p.7



against Israel and/or its supporters' wishes. In addition, its reputation and perceived political influence means that its suggestions and preferences will be taken seriously in the formation of policy, meaning that it does not always have to act to be influential. Overcoming its efforts when it was fully mobilised on a controversial issue would require a large investment of political capital on the part of the White House, something that may be in scarce supply, as was demonstrated in the Reagan administration's struggle to gain congressional approval for the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia.<sup>59</sup> If all other forces are in balance, its efforts therefore have the potential to be decisive, as any other powerful interest group able to sway legislators and officials to its point of view would be.

### **8.3 Other lobbies: Oil, agricultural, and ethnic**

Aside from ethnic lobbies, the only groups with a substantial psychological or financial investment in the US relationship with Iran are trade-focused. The most obvious one of these is the oil industry, given the size of Iran's own reserves, and the fact that it borders regions that contain two of the greatest concentrations of proven hydrocarbon reserves in the world: the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. American agricultural interests also had a stake in US-Iranian trade, and lobbied for the easing of restrictions on agricultural exports to 'rogue states.' The interests of these groups placed them on the other side of the debate from pro-Israel lobbyists like AIPAC. We shall now examine these groups, and how their ability to influence policy towards Iran was less than that of their opponents.

#### **8.3.1 Arab- and Iranian-Americans**

Few ethnic lobbies are as professional, motivated and well-organised as AIPAC. For instance, Arab-Americans, most scholars agree, are not as politically unified or their advocacy groups well-organised as they tend to be

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<sup>59</sup> See Latham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia*, for details

amongst American Jews.<sup>60</sup> There are relatively few Arab-Americans in absolute terms, with an estimated population of approximately 1.6 million in 2010, according to the US Census Bureau, comprising about 0.5% of the US population as a whole. Its members are immigrants from, or descended from immigrants from, almost two dozen different countries. For example, the size of the Palestinian-American community was probably less than 100,000 in 2010, compared to an estimated 500,000 Lebanese-Americans,<sup>61</sup> of whom a majority are Christians and somewhat unsympathetic to the goals of the wider 'Arab lobby'.<sup>62</sup> Despite the fact individual Arab-Americans tend to be comparatively well-educated and prosperous, Arab-Americans as a collective body tend to contribute less in terms of funding political campaigns than Jewish Americans.<sup>63</sup> These 'internal' differences makes it difficult for lobbying groups that represent their interests to build up a national network of supporters and mobilise them to bring pressure to bear, or to channel political contributions in a way that maximises their impact on election campaigns, or to fund day-to-day lobbying activities. As some argue, the situation is so marked as to call into the question the existence of an organised 'Arab Lobby' in the first place.<sup>64</sup>

The Iranian-American population is even smaller, numbering approximately 450,000 in 2010,<sup>65</sup> rising from approximately 330,000 in 2000<sup>66</sup> (though, as with many ethnic groups in the US, these figures are disputed) making for an even smaller pool of resources on which to draw, despite the fact that Iranian-Americans also tend to be more affluent and better educated than the

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<sup>60</sup> Bard, *The Water's Edge and Beyond*, p.7-11, p.13-17; Unslaner 'American Interests in the Balance', in Cigler & Loomis, *Interest Group Politics*, p.308

<sup>61</sup> This data was retrieved using the U.S. Census Bureau's 'American FactFinder' website, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>, accessed 21-04-2012

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell Bard, 'The Israel and Arab Lobbies', Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/lobby.html#2> accessed 31-04-2012

<sup>63</sup> Unslaner 'American Interests in the Balance?', in Cigler & Loomis, *Interest Group Politics*, p.307

<sup>64</sup> Bard, 'The Israel and Arab Lobbies'

<sup>65</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder

<sup>66</sup> Soraya Fati & Raha Rafii, *Strength in Numbers: The Relative Concentration of Iranian Americans Across the United States*, Iran Census Report, National Iranian American Council, September 2003

national average.<sup>67</sup> The issue of factional division is also true in the case of the Iranian-American community, who are, in regards to lobbying organisations, relatively poorly-organised and fragmented amongst different groups.<sup>68</sup> Iranian-Americans also tend to have a complex and ambiguous relationship with their country of origin, with many being exiles suspicious of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its policies,<sup>69</sup> and perhaps less willing to give it the benefit of the doubt on some issues, though at the same time also in favour of the US pursuing diplomatic, rather than coercive, policies towards it.<sup>70</sup> In demographic terms, they are also clustered more intensely in a relatively few districts, meaning that they have access to fewer legislators as constituents, with the largest number clustered in California, particularly around Los Angeles, and form small proportions of their local population.<sup>71</sup> Lobbying groups representing Iranian and Arab-Americans also spend some of their time and energy campaigning against discrimination and bigotry faced by their members. Groups representing Jewish Americans are also involved in this (most notably the Anti-Defamation League), but this is one of the things that separates any 'Jewish lobby' that exists in the US from the 'Israel lobby,' which concentrates on Israel and foreign affairs. No group comparable in size or influence to AIPAC lobbies on behalf of Iran or any single Arab country. Some Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, have retained professional lobbying and public relations firms, but are hindered by the fact that they are, after all, foreign states and not as well-regarded by the American public as Israel, whereas "the Israel lobby, by contrast, is a manifestation of the political engagement of a subset of American citizens, and so its activities are widely and correctly seen as a legitimate form of political activity."<sup>72</sup> Foreign governments, in contrast, do not represent any actual American voters whose support a politician may require to

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<sup>67</sup> Ali Mostashari & Ali Khodamhosseini, *An Overview of Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Iranian-American Community Based on the 2000 U.S. Census*, Iranian Studies Group at MIT, February 2004. Available at: <http://www.isgmit.org/projects-storage/census/socioeconomic.pdf> accessed 24-01-2013

<sup>68</sup> Paul & Paul, *Ethnic Groups and US Foreign Policy*, p.53, 156

<sup>69</sup> Ali Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Roots of Mistrust* (London: Hurst & Co., 2006), p.134

<sup>70</sup> Neil Macfarquhar, 'Exiles in 'Tehrangelles' are split on Iran', *New York Times*, 9 May 2006

<sup>71</sup> Fati & Rafii, *Strength in Numbers*

<sup>72</sup> Mearsheimer & Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p.144

gain or retain office. In regards to foreign states attempting to influence members of the various diaspora populations living in the US, Israel, in particular, is able to retain strong links to the Jewish population of the United States, but Arab states, and Iran, are much less able to do so without being regarded with suspicion, and are less likely to be seen as in need of sustained political support.

### **8.3.2 Business lobbies**

The other constituencies with a stake in US-Iranian relations are rooted in commerce between the two states. In terms of lobbying by corporations, like oil companies, and commerce-oriented interest groups, these are also marginal in regards to many foreign policy issues, although these organisations contribute far more to political campaigns than ethnic lobbies and employ many more lobbyists. As a result, lobbying by the business community seems to be a relatively insignificant force in regards to many specific foreign policies such as dual containment, at least in recent decades.<sup>73</sup> Business groups, such as arms manufacturers, have in the past attempted to act as a counterweight to pro-Israel lobbying, such as in opposing attempts to block arms deals with Arab countries, but success has been mixed. For instance, during the Reagan administration, the sale of AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia in 1981 proved to be a bruising political battle for the White House, though it was eventually narrowly successful, and one that was assisted by the lobbying efforts of the manufacturers of these aircraft Boeing and United Technologies, amongst others.<sup>74</sup> Some subsequent arms deals with Arab countries in the 1980s were, however, dropped.<sup>75</sup> On the whole the Reagan administration's battle with Congress over the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia, lobbying by business groups seems to have been largely

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<sup>73</sup> One unusual exception may be the exemptions won by soft-drink companies such as Coca-Cola Co. from US sanctions on trade with Sudan in the 1990s. Sudan was the world's primary source of gum Arabic, an important ingredient in their products. Jonathan Randal, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist*, revised edition (London, IB Tauris, 2012), p.159

<sup>74</sup> Tivnan, *The Lobby*, p.153

<sup>75</sup> Bard, 'The Influence of Ethnic Groups on American Middle East Policy', in Kegley & Wittkopf, *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy*, p.66-67

inconsequential, though Mearsheimer and Walt argue that it played a role.<sup>76</sup> In his in-depth study of the AWACS affair, Latham states that “the business community has, for the most part, abstained from involvement in American policy in the Middle East.”<sup>77</sup> In contrast, he attributes the success of the sale in that instance to the obvious strategic import of Saudi Arabia, Cold War tensions, and the intense lobbying efforts of President Reagan and his aides.

Oil companies, cited by some as part of the 'pro-Arab' lobby, have made surprisingly little impact, at least in the 1990s, and have instead focused their lobbying efforts on other areas rather than foreign policy, such as trade, environmental regulation, permits for exploration and taxation.<sup>78</sup> This claim was also advanced by a former director of AIPAC, Morris Amitay.<sup>79</sup> This view clashes with that of his predecessor as AIPAC director, I.L. Kenen, who argued that the major American oil companies operating in Middle East was part of a “petro-diplomatic complex” that made an ethnic Arab lobby unnecessary, though this view referred to an earlier era, when the US was building its involvement in Saudi Arabia in the post-war period, and most day-to-day interactions with Saudi Arabia were conducted via ARAMCO.<sup>80</sup> The efforts by various oil companies to challenge the sanctions on Iran were also limited by the difficulties they discovered in operating in Iran, which lessened the enthusiasm of some of them for operating there. BP, originally very interested in expanding into Iran<sup>81</sup> (perhaps appropriate given that it started life as the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company), in particular, found the Iranian political scene difficult to navigate and the Iranian government an antagonistic negotiating partner and eventually concluded that the returns did not justify the trouble involved,<sup>82</sup> especially with the added worries of being denied Export-Import bank funding and credits from the US under ILSA.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Mearsheimer & Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p.143-4

<sup>77</sup> Latham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia*, p.61

<sup>78</sup> Mearsheimer & Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p.144

<sup>79</sup> Tivnan, *The Lobby*, 194

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Mitchell Bard, ‘The Israeli and Arab Lobbies’

<sup>81</sup> Robert Corzine, ‘BP ready to invest in Iran if US line eases,’ *Financial Times*, 23 April 1998

<sup>82</sup> Author’s correspondence with former oil company executive, May 2012

<sup>83</sup> Weissman interview

The company's merger with the US-based Amoco raised the stakes for it in this regard by increasing its stake in the American market.<sup>84</sup>

Nonetheless, oil companies and associated businesses did make some attempts to prevent the passage of ILSA, and sponsored some attempts to support criticism of the sanctions regime against Iran, though these proved to be ineffectual. Dick Cheney, for instance, at the time a former Secretary of Defense and the head of the oil services company Halliburton, was publically opposed to the sanctions imposed on Iran by ILSA and Clinton's prior Executive Orders and lobbied against them.<sup>85</sup> Fayazmanesh asserts that Clinton sought to reduce the pressure on Iran and re-forge some economic links between Iran and the US at the behest of the companies like Halliburton. He points to the opportunities these companies sought in the Caspian Sea in the early 1990s as the reason for their opposition to ILSA, something which would be severely hindered by the American economic embargo on Iran. A sign of this, argues Fayazmanesh, was the foundation of the American-Iranian Council (AIC) in 1997, which received much of its funding from oil companies, who were represented on its board of directors, and several were also corporate members of the organisation, including Unocal, Conoco and Mondoil. He also asserts that lobbying by agricultural firms was also a factor, with Archer Daniels Midland and Continental Grain seeking an end to sanctions affecting their business with Iran.<sup>86</sup> This activity was co-ordinated by an umbrella group, 'USA\*Engage', which was closely associated with the National Foreign Trade Council, and supported legislation which aimed to curtail unilateral American sanctions, the Lugar-Hamilton-Crane Sanctions Policy Reform Act.<sup>87</sup> This legislation was designed to make imposing sanctions by Congress a more rigorous and measured process, imposing an automatic two-year time limit on sanctions (after which they had to be renewed by the president or congress), and guaranteeing the president more latitude in the imposition and

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<sup>84</sup> Rodman, *Sanctions Beyond Borders*, p.190

<sup>85</sup> Terence Lau, 'Triggering Parent Company Liability Under United States Sanctions Regimes: The Troubling Implications of Prohibiting Approval and Facilitation,' *American Business Law Journal*, 41 (4) 2004, p.414.

<sup>86</sup> Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars, and the Policy of Dual Containment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), electronic edition, chapter 5

<sup>87</sup> William Roberts, 'Sanctions flexibility sought,' *Journal of Commerce*, 25 June 1998

application of sanctions.<sup>88</sup> USA\*Engage was founded in 1997, and describes itself as ‘a broad coalition of Americans speaking out for US engagement overseas’.<sup>89</sup> Its membership includes large corporate concerns like Boeing, Caterpillar, Unocal, Chevron, Mobil, Texaco, and IBM.<sup>90</sup> USA\*Engage has consistently pressed for the reform of unilateral American sanctions on foreign states, including Iran and Cuba. Many companies became much more strident in their criticisms of the Iranian sanctions following the Clinton administration’s decision to waive the sanctions on the deal between Iran and Total, Petronas and Gazprom in 1998, arguing that it demonstrated that American firms were excluded from the Iranian market without having any impact on Iran’s ability to carry out international trade.<sup>91</sup> Support for the sanctions reform legislation was described as “effectively a political counter attack to two major trade sanctions bills enacted by the 104th Congress after Republicans won control of the House for the first time in 52 years, the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act and the Helms-Burton Libertad Act”.<sup>92</sup> It led to a larger battle on sanctions legislation as supporters of reform struggled with proponents of sanctions, like the Christian Coalition, after reform efforts stalled.<sup>93</sup>

## 8.4 Lobbying: legislative outcomes

Given its advantages over its rivals, AIPAC was well-placed to attempt to influence the legislative agenda with regards to Iran. Its prestige, expertise, and perceived power allowed it to find sympathetic legislators to act as a channel of access into the legislative process in Congress, and coordinate with them to carry

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<sup>88</sup> Michael Lelyveld, ‘Sanctions lose their sting as US obsession grows’, *Journal of Commerce*, 19 June 1998

<sup>89</sup> See [http://www.usaengage.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=43](http://www.usaengage.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=43), accessed 21-02-2012

<sup>90</sup> Ken Silverstein, ‘So You Want to Trade with a Dictator,’ *Mother Jones*, June 1998, p.41

<sup>91</sup> Michael Lelyveld, ‘Clinton makes few friends at home on sanctions waiver,’ *Journal of Commerce*, 20 May 1998

<sup>92</sup> Roberts, ‘Sanctions flexibility sought’

<sup>93</sup> Micheal Lelyveld, ‘Last minute Senate maneuvering stalls sanctions bill’, *Journal of Commerce*, 9 October 1998

its agenda into action. Aside from an attempt to assist the government of Israel, it possessed its own reasons for taking up the cause of Iran.

#### **8.4.1 AIPAC vs. Iran**

Divisions within AIPAC and the wider Jewish-American community became a factor in the drive to sanction Iran in the early 1990s with the announcement of the Oslo Accords and the unfolding of the Arab-Israeli peace process. Thomas and others, including AIPAC insiders, have described how the organization became increasingly identified with the 'hawkish' right-wing political tendency in Israel, represented by the Likud Party, which dominated Israeli politics for most of the period between 1977 and 1992.<sup>94</sup> AIPAC's endorsement of the peace process therefore threatened to provoke a damaging split within the organisation, which had previously been at pains to present a united front and in turn avoided taking positions that risked splitting the American Jewish community (for example, AIPAC has never endorsed the presence of Israeli settlements in the West Bank or Gaza).<sup>95</sup> Some major donors who opposed negotiations with the Palestinians went so far as the cease making contributions to the organisation, and as a consequence it was forced to lay-off staff to cut costs.<sup>96</sup> Iran proved to be a consensus issue that energised AIPAC's supporters, and allowed it to maintain its role as the vanguard of the organised pro-Israeli lobby amongst Jewish Americans. There were also some divisions within the organisation over tactics: some wanted to pursue economic sanctions against Iran, where others wanted to focus on preventing the flow of missile and nuclear technology to Iran from Russia and China.<sup>97</sup> As it turned out, both of these aims found fertile ground in the Congress and were implemented to some degree. There are also some observers who believe that long-standing mistrust on the part of Yitzhak Rabin towards AIPAC may have been a factor in his decision to ask the organisation to lobby for extra Congressional pressure on

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel*, p.24. The only prime minister of Israel in this period who was not a member of the Likud Party was Shimon Peres, for a two year period in the mid-1980s as part of an unusual Labor-Likud coalition.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Weissman

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Weissman

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Rosen



Iran. In particular, some believe he may have worried about agitation within the US against his plans for a peace accord with Syria, and hoped to find something to occupy the American pro-Israeli lobby's attention.<sup>98</sup> As a leader of the Israeli Labor Party, Peres was also mistrustful of the organizations growing links to Likud in the 1980s, and saw it as an 'interloper' in his relationship with Clinton.<sup>99</sup>

The organization subsequently produced a policy document in early April 1995 that outlined and advocated a series of stringent measures that the US could undertake to toughen the existing sanctions against Iran. Amongst these measures were the severance of all US-Iranian trade and the imposition of secondary sanctions against foreign companies trading with Iran.<sup>100</sup> As discussed in previous chapter, this program was adopted by Senator Alfonse D'Amato of New York, who introduced different pieces of legislation to outlaw US-Iranian oil trade, and subsequently all US-Iranian trade with the assistance of AIPAC, which eventually became ILSA. It was these bills, inspired by and drafted with the assistance of AIPAC,<sup>101</sup> that led President Clinton to introduce the Executive Orders discussed in previous chapters, 12957 in March of 1995, and 12959 in April, which outlawed American-Iranian oil commerce and then virtually all US-Iranian trade respectively. When this proved to be unsuccessful in pre-empting the congressional drive towards imposing sanctions, the White House moved to attempt to water down the legislation that resulted, originally titled the Iran Foreign Oil Sanctions Act. The first version was introduced by Senator D'Amato in September of 1995 and focused on sanctioning the export of technology to Iran's energy industry by foreign (i.e. non-American) firms. The Senate version of the act attracted 44 cosponsors, while the House version, introduced by Rep. Benjamin Gilman, the chairman of the House International Relations Committee, attracted 157. By the time it passed the Senate for the first time in its initial version in December of 1995 its provisions included sanctions

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with Weissman

<sup>99</sup> Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel*, p.137-138 and 158-59

<sup>100</sup> AIPAC, 'Comprehensive US Sanctions Against Iran: A Plan for Action' April 2, 1995, cited in Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.187

<sup>101</sup> Dreyfus, 'AIPAC from the Inside, Part 1: Isolating Iran'; Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.188

on foreign investment in Iranian oil and gas. The House of Representatives passed its version in June of 1996, and the Senate passed the final version in July, and President Clinton signed it into law the following month. Even more important was the role AIPAC played in working with legislators and their staffs in proposing and drafting the legislation itself. Senator D'Amato had previously proposed bills sanctioning companies trading with Iran, but these had received little attention and support.<sup>102</sup> It was only when AIPAC began to publicise the issue and threw its weight behind attempts to legislate a tougher sanctions regime that the notion of sanctioning Iran and its trading partners began to gain traction. The announcement of the deal between the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Conoco around this time was therefore extremely helpful in raising the profile of the issue.<sup>103</sup> In an interview with the author, the State Department official who oversaw the negotiations between AIPAC and Senator D'Amato's staff and the White House credits the organisation with the passage of ILSA, and expressed doubt that it would have passed without its efforts.<sup>104</sup>

In fact, AIPAC appears to have been involved at virtually every stage of the legislative process. The legislation was opposed by the White House, which saw it as an example not only of Congressional intrusion onto presidential turf (foreign policy) that could restrict executive autonomy, but also because it threatened to damage relations with American allies by pushing unpopular unilateral measures. The White House therefore sought to 'water down' its provisions to contain the damage, once they realised that it attracted so much support in Congress that it could not be blocked. Executive branch officials therefore began negotiations with Senator D'Amato and his aides, and AIPAC itself, in order to produce a more congenial, compromise bill that offered the president some choices in how and when it should be applied.<sup>105</sup> Reportedly, it was AIPAC's representative who helped strike a crucial compromise between different Congressional committees, and made a final concession that the bill

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Weissman

<sup>103</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.186

<sup>104</sup> Telephone interview with David Welch, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs, London, August 2012

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Weissman

would not include sanctions on foreign banks that did business with Iran that broke the final deadlock and led to the passage of the bill.<sup>106</sup> While other instances of major Congressional intervention in foreign policy are not uncommon in US political history (as we saw in the last chapter), it is much rarer that these are conceived and shepherded through the process by a small coalition focused on a single interest group, especially in the face of White House disapproval. Perhaps one of the closest other examples would be the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. In that case, Congress mandated sanctions on US-Soviet trade by amending the 1974 Trade Act to penalize the USSR for its efforts to restrict Jewish emigration. Much of the impetus for the legislation came from the convictions and presidential ambitions of Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson, but was also sustained with the assistance of pro-Israel lobbyists and the organized labour movement in the US.<sup>107</sup> The legislation that mandated non-compliance with the Arab economic boycott of Israel was also strongly influenced by interest groups outside of the formal structure of government, notably trade groups and pro-Israel groups, who negotiated a compromise bill amongst themselves that was then enacted by Congress, despite the misgivings of the White House.<sup>108</sup>

A former AIPAC official, Keith Weissman, claimed that many oil companies chose not to try to compete with AIPAC and the Israel lobby before and after the passage of ILSA because its influence was so strong, and instead chose to cooperate with it to achieve other, mutual objectives, such as lobbying for the construction of the oil pipeline that today links the Caspian Sea port of Baku in Azerbaijan, via Tbilisi in Georgia, with the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan in Turkey, bypassing Iranian territory.<sup>109</sup> This, in particular, involved a tactical alignment<sup>110</sup> with pro-Azerbaijani and pro-Turkish lobbyists working to

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<sup>106</sup> Robert Greenberger & Laurie Land, ‘Influencing business becomes AIPAC’s affair,’ *Wall Street Journal Europe*, 18 June 1996

<sup>107</sup> For a detailed account, see Paula Stern, *Water’s Edge: Domestic Politics and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Greenwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979)

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Franck & Edward Weisband, *Foreign Policy By Congress* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.200-209

<sup>109</sup> Robert Dreyfus, ‘AIPAC from the Inside, Part 1: Isolating Iran’

<sup>110</sup> Ambrosio, ‘Entangling Alliances: The Turkish-Israeli Lobbying Partnership and Its Unintended Consequences,’ p.153

remove sanctions on Azerbaijan imposed by Congress in 1992,<sup>111</sup> angering pro-Armenian lobbyists who had previously enjoyed a cordial and cooperative relationship with pro-Israel lobbyists.<sup>112</sup> Within the oil industry, there was a perception that it had been outfought by AIPAC, and had not stood a chance in its attempts to prevent the severing of trade links with Iran.<sup>113</sup>

Given the advantages enjoyed by AIPAC described above, there was no effective coalition to challenge the original drive towards the imposition of economic sanctions against Iran. The pro-Israeli lobby, in the form of AIPAC, enjoyed high levels of organisation, credibility, popularity and resources, and was therefore highly successful in persuading legislators to adopt its policy proposals. Trade lobbyists, particularly oil companies, were at a disadvantage with regards to their desire to trade with Iran, given its unpopularity with the American public and their lack of widespread support within wider American society. It was also a less important issue from their perspective, which made capitulation an acceptable alternative, as Iran was not a major source of revenue, especially for the biggest oil companies.<sup>114</sup> The executive branch, in many ways the most powerful lobbying force on foreign policy issues it could not control directly, also chose not to attempt to arrest the push for additional economic sanctions on Iran. This stems from the issues discussed in previous chapters: the decision of the administration to try to isolate Iran from the peace process, and the co-option of the President to the view of Iran as a strategic rival held by Rabin and his successors as Prime Minister of Israel. Instead, the executive branch sought to use its own lobbying power in a more subtle fashion, by modifying the sanctions legislation in such a way that it did the least possible damage to the administration's existing foreign policy (though, as described in previous chapters, it led to serious disagreements with both the EU and Russia).

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<sup>111</sup> Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran*, chapter 5

<sup>112</sup> AIPAC avoids direct lobbying on issues not directly concerned with Israel, but offered 'tacit support.' Ambrosio, 'Entangling Alliances: The Turkish-Israeli Lobbying Partnership and its Untended Consequences,' p.153

<sup>113</sup> Correspondence with former oil company executive

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Rosen

#### 8.4.2 Sanctions challenged

In response to the threat of legislation on sanctions reform, the Clinton administration did eventually ease the sanctions on sales of American foodstuffs to Iran, Libya and Sudan, in April 1999, but at the same time refused a request from the oil company Mobil to undertake an 'oil swap' deal with Iran, in which oil pumped by Mobil would be deposited in a northern Iranian port in return for an equal amount from southern Iran.<sup>115</sup> The result of this, argues Fayazmanesh, was "a chaotic policy that took no particular direction."<sup>116</sup> This judgement fails to account for the complex interplay between the executive and legislative branches and the varying impact of different groups striving to influence policy. Instead, it would be more accurate to view these shifts and inconsistencies as the result of a shifting coalition of forces within the US political system contending to shape policy towards Iran and the process of imposing sanctions. As O'Sullivan concludes, changes in American sanctions policy owed much to the contestation between pro and anti-sanctions constituencies. While this was facilitated by changes in policymaking ushered in by changes in Congress and the end of the Cold War (as we saw in the previous chapter), "it also reveals the growing salience of ethnic, religious, and other single-issue lobbies and Congress's receptivity to them...The tapering off of the number of new sanctions enacted in the mid to late 1990s in part reflects the mobilization of other interest groups – led by American business – to counter the earlier upsurge."<sup>117</sup>

The turn away from sanctions and pressure from anti-sanctions groups was apparent in Congress (including the departure of Senator D'Amato, the legislator who had done so much to bring ILSA to the statute book, who was defeated in his bid for re-election in 1998). Like O'Sullivan, Hersman attributes this in part to a 'sanctions backlash,' a reaction against the number of sanctions imposed by Congress and their perceived lack of success, coupled with the

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<sup>115</sup> Shirl McArthur, 'Luger, Crane, Reintroduce Sanctions Reforms, While Colleagues Earn Their Pro-Israel PAC Contributions', *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, June 1999, <http://www.wrmea.com/component/content/article/177/2251-lugar-crane-reintroduce-sanctions-reforms-while-colleagues-earn-their-pro-israel-pac-contributions.html>, accessed 20-02-2012

<sup>116</sup> Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran*, chapter 5

<sup>117</sup> O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, p.23.

complaints of American businesses shut out of commercial opportunities abroad.<sup>118</sup> Aside from this, a new grouping of legislators emerged who saw benefits to re-engaging with 'rogue states' like Iran, Libya and Sudan. They hailed from 'farm states', heavily-dependent on agriculture, and pressed for the scrapping of restrictions on sales of agricultural products to states sanctioned by the US at the same time that demand for American agricultural exports was declining due to the Asian financial crisis, and, as described above, were supported by groups like USA\*Engage and agri-businesses. This was catalysed by the announcement of a request from Iran to purchase \$500 million of American grain and other crops in 1998, comprising over 5 million metric tons of wheat, soybeans, corn rice, sugar and other products. As an example, after the request was made and became public, Senator Larry Craig of Idaho wrote to the president recommending that the sale be approved by the Department of Commerce, and the letter was co-signed by more than 30 members of Congress, including 15 members of the Senate.<sup>119</sup> The deal was approved in April of 1999, and also coincided with another push by some legislators (including Senators Hagel, Lugar and Crane) and exporters to introduce legislation<sup>120</sup> to revise the use of sanctions, which, some argue, "prompted the Clinton administration to pre-empt further congressional action by announcing a series of modifications and changes to its use of sanctions."<sup>121</sup> Ultimately, efforts to reform the sanctions process during the second Clinton administration met with mixed success. The threat of legislation did prompt the administration to introduce some reforms (discussed below), but the legislation itself was resisted by the Administration, which believed it placed too many restrictions on the executive and not enough on the legislative branch. Despite its popularity in the legislature, these two measures did not reach the statute book.<sup>122</sup> In contrast, another measure became law in 2000, though this codified the moves the

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<sup>118</sup> Hersman, *Friends and Foes*, p.50-1

<sup>119</sup> Gene Linn, 'Farmers seek spark in grain export bottom line,' *Journal of Commerce*, 27 January 1999

<sup>120</sup> Lugar's 'Sanctions Policy Reform Act' in the Senate, and the 'Enhancement of Trade, Security, and Human Rights through Sanctions Reform' in the House of Representatives. O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, p.22

<sup>121</sup> Carter & Scott, *Choosing to Lead*, p.162-3

<sup>122</sup> O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, p.23

administration had already made with regards to the export of food and medical supplies to 'rogue states' like Iran, Sudan and Libya.<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious of the shifts towards rapprochement in American policy towards Iran was the attempt by the administration to seize the opportunity offered by the election of Khatami to the presidency of Iran in the elections of 1997. This was assessed by the president, amongst others, as a chance to repair relations with Iran, and the administration attempted several overtures to Khatami and his government. The absence of a serious congressional challenge to this new direction took some high-ranking executive branch officials by surprise.<sup>124</sup> Some executive branch officials credit this 'farm lobby' with giving some political cover to Clinton's decision to seek a rapprochement with Khatami's government.<sup>125</sup> This had been a serious concern of the executive branch at the time, given the previous introduction of the ILSA, the ILA, and the on-going pressure regarding Iran's acquisition of nuclear and missile technology from Russia and China.<sup>126</sup> As noted in chapter 6, AIPAC and the Israeli government also signalled their acceptance of the adoption of a less confrontational strategy in regards to Iran after the election of Khatami, and raised no objections to traveling in this direction, though both the Israeli government and AIPAC retained serious doubts about how much would really change. Both AIPAC and the Israeli government (at this point under Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud, who began his premiership as less focused on Iran than Rabin and Labor) were eager to see what opportunities Khatami's election would bring to 'get Iran out of the terrorism business,' as one observer put it, and were just as willing to see this come about through endogenous changes in Iranian politics as through pressure applied from the outside.<sup>127</sup> The new Likud government in Israel saw it as prudent to lower the tension with Iran that had

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<sup>123</sup> The Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act stipulated that the president seek congressional approval before imposing unilateral sanctions that prevented the export of American food or medical supplies. See Dianne Rennack, 'Economic Sanctions: Legislation in the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress,' *CRS Report for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, December 15, 2000

<sup>124</sup> Author's interview with Martin Indyk, Washington DC, March 2012

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Indyk

<sup>126</sup> Author's interview with Kenneth Pollack, Washington DC, March 2012

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Pollack

been built up under the previous Labor-led coalition.<sup>128</sup> In one sense, both had already achieved a major goal in regards to American policy towards Iran. ILSA, by this point, was already on the statute book, and could not be removed without Congressional approval. Meanwhile, pressure on the White House to curtail Iran's nuclear and missile development programs was also maintained by Israel and AIPAC via Congress. These measures were directed against Russia and China specifically, rather than Iran, and the administration did its best to slow down their passage, going so far as to veto one measure (as discussed in Chapter 5).<sup>129</sup>

## 8.5 Conclusions

The influence of interest groups on foreign policy is difficult to measure effectively. In the case of dual containment, some things are clear. Firstly, AIPAC was successful in persuading Congress to adopt its proposals for secondary sanctions on Iran. The original proposal for these sanctions originated in an AIPAC policy briefing that was circulated amongst legislators and members, and the organisation played a critical role in ensuring its passage through Congress and into law. It also maintained the pressure on legislators and the White House to limit Iranian development of missiles and nuclear technology.

While the impact of lobbyists on Congress is measureable, making a definitive judgement about the role and influence of pro-Israeli lobbyists (and of pressure from the government of Israel itself) on dual containment more broadly remains a difficult proposition, making any strong conclusions about the influence of this factor tenuous. This difficulty stems from the same problem discussed in the previous chapter, one of gauging how far Congressional sanctions on Iran restricted the autonomy of the executive branch. If, as Brzezinski argues,<sup>130</sup> the passage of ILSA and the tightening of sanctions on Iran

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<sup>128</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p.196-200

<sup>129</sup> Nancy Dunne, 'Clinton vetoes sanctions law,' *Financial Times*, 25 June 1998

<sup>130</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2007), p.102



made a rapprochement between the US and Iran effectively impossible, the pro-Israel lobby (and Congress) played a decisive role in shaping American 'dual containment' policy. Given that the circumstances that would put this to the test did not materialise, this can only remain a matter of opinion, though as we saw in the previous chapter the evidence is mixed, and the imposition of congressional sanctions made long-term prospects for rapprochement between the US and Iran more subject to Congressional influence.

Whatever the truth of this point of view, AIPAC was far more successful than the other groups which hoped to shape US policy towards Iran, namely oil companies and the coalition of exporters operating under the umbrella of USA\*Engage, which sought to maintain economic links and trade with Iran, without losing their stake in the American market. They were ultimately unable to counter the lobbying efforts of AIPAC, and therefore for the most part sought to accommodate themselves to the organised pro-Israel lobby, and cooperate with AIPAC on other projects of mutual benefit, such as oil pipelines. This result reflects the sympathy the American public and legislators held for Israel and the skill to which AIPAC deployed its efforts, as well as the unpopularity of Iran and the lack of an effective pro-Iran lobby which had more than a commercial stake in the direction of American policy towards Iran. This is part of a noticeable historical trend, in which pro-Israel forces in the US have often succeeded in influencing (but categorically not controlling) American policy in the Middle East. What is clear in this case is that interest groups like AIPAC and USA\*Engage are able to influence policy, but only under certain conditions.

Subsequent developments in the relationship between the US and Iran (and Israel) cloud the picture somewhat. While some sources indicate that 'sanctions fatigue' and the influence of legislators and lobbyists for agricultural interests was enough to persuade the US to allow sales of agricultural products to Iran and other 'rogue states,' this took place at the same time as a wider initiative on the part of the Clinton administration to recast relations with Iran in a more positive way in the wake of the election of Khatami. This initiative was also backed by both Israel and AIPAC, and was eagerly pursued by both President

Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, making it difficult to determine the effectiveness of these factors in relation to each other.

In summary, the interplay of legislative and executive forces, and the influences of interest groups on these forces in turn, combined to shape American policy, in ways conditioned by the varying strengths of these forces, circumstance, and the unique features of the American political system.

## **CHAPTER 9 Conclusions & intervening variables assessed**

This thesis has examined in detail the origins and evolution of US ‘dual containment’ policy between 1991 and 2001, and the factors conditioning its conception and adoption by policymakers. Consequently, it is now time to consider what conclusions can be drawn from this undertaking and reflect on what has been accomplished in the previous pages, as well as assess the overall impact and contribution of the different intervening variables. This chapter summarises the previous chapters and outlines the conclusions drawn from the research contained therein. It also discusses the theoretical framework adopted, and concludes with a discussion of the contributions to the field of this research. It then assesses the varying impact of each intervening variable in the case of dual containment, and concludes with possible future directions for research in NCR, FPA and IR more widely as it pertains to the study of American foreign policy and the Middle East.

### **9.1 Dual containment and the Persian Gulf in the early 1990s**

Chapter 2 outlined the theoretical framework utilised in this thesis, providing a short introduction to NCR and discussed how the elements of the thesis drawn from FPA were integrated into the framework. In addition, it discussed the objections raised by some scholars to the core tenets of NCR, as well as justifying this choice of framework. Chapters 3 and 4 discussed the historical background to the time period covered in this thesis, (the 1990s). Chapter 3 explored the ways in which previous American involvement in the Persian Gulf created enduring ties with some regional states, accompanied by an infrastructure that enabled US intervention the Gulf, and precedents for American management of the sub-region’s security system. Chapter 4 explored the corresponding endogenous factors that enabled and incentivised American involvement, and introduces the idea of the Persian Gulf as a scalene tripolar system, with three poles: Saudi Arabia (the weakest pole, hence scalene), Iran and Iraq. Chapter 5 discussed the circumstances under which ‘dual containment’ was conceived of and introduced to the public by policymakers, and also traced

the evolution of the American containment of Iran and Iraq, paying close attention to how this shifted thanks to changing circumstances in the Middle East, and legislative activism in the US. The following three chapters dealt in turn with the 'intervening variables' identified in chapter 2: perceptions of power and threat that played formative roles in the conception and evolution of dual containment (chapter 6), the role of the domestic political structures in which the policy was created and implemented, particularly the impact of the perennial tug-of-war between Congress and the White House over foreign policy (chapter 7), and the impact of policy coalitions on the policymaking process, especially the role of pro-Israel and pro-trade interest groups (chapter 8).

With this accomplished, it is worth revisiting the context in which 'dual containment' was designed to address. As we saw in chapter 3, the US has generally pursued a 'realist' strategy in the Persian Gulf region, with policymakers perceiving the region and its resources as a 'prize' to be kept out of the hands of any potentially hostile forces. In chapter 4, it was argued that this was an interest that coincided with those of some regional states seeking to enlist external allies against neighbours, leading to the ultimate result that the US has sought to prevent the domination of the Persian Gulf by any unfriendly state. The consequence of this had been that the US had traditionally favoured a balance of power in the region that had tilted in the favour of its allies, allies which had changed over the years as circumstances dictated, with the exception of Saudi Arabia and the other states of the GCC, which have closely aligned with the US (or Britain) since the end of the Second World War.

However, upon the conclusion of the 1991 Gulf War, American policymakers were faced with the following dilemma: how to ensure security and stability in a region considered vital to US national interests, but without any reliable regional proxies that could act as the managers and enforcers of a benign security system? Saudi Arabia, America's closest regional ally, was not militarily strong enough and had required American military assistance to confront Iraq. As argued in chapter 4, from a realist perspective, the Persian Gulf forms a scalene tripolar system, consisting of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia (and to some extent the other members of the GCC). While these states had

previously been able to maintain something akin to a balance between themselves with minimal need for an overt external patron(s) with a shifting system of alignments, the Iranian revolution and Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait put paid to this. With no possibility of enlisting any consequential regional allies, Saudi Arabia (the weakest pole in terms of conventional military strength) chose instead to accept the transition of American power from 'over the horizon' to a posture of 'in the back yard', and run the risks of provoking a domestic backlash in the process. A subsequent attempt to enlist Syria and Egypt in regional security (the Damascus Declaration) foundered. Saddam Hussein's Iraq was the threat that had to be contained, while Iran came with an overabundance of historical baggage and also represented something of a threat in the minds of American policymakers, given the poisonous legacy of historical relations between the two states, its hostility to American presence in the region, and its antagonistic relationship with American allies like Saudi Arabia. The scalene triangle was no longer capable of maintaining an endogenous balance.

There were also other important, global factors that distinguished the 1990s from previous eras. The end of the Cold War meant that the previously overriding impetus of American foreign policy, the containment of the Soviet Union, was gone. This allowed the US more autonomy in its formulation of policy, as considerations of the Soviet response was no longer a factor, and gave the US freer rein to attempt to shape the international system, and in particular adopt a quasi-hegemonic role in the security system of the Persian Gulf sub-region, which retained a vital status in the eyes of American policymakers despite the demise of bipolar competition.

Viewed with hindsight, it is clear that 'dual containment' was not the rejection of a 'balance of power' system in the Persian Gulf per se, but rather a reconfiguration of it by upgrading the role played by the US in the system. While Martin Indyk (widely cited as the architect of the policy of dual containment) said that the idea of the balance of power in the Persian Gulf has been discredited in the eyes of American policymakers, he was speaking in terms of the regional context, and this rejection was not of the same nature as that of the rejection of the 'balance of power' discussed by other authors, such as

Quinn,<sup>1</sup> on ideological grounds. Instead, it signalled the construction of a new balance of power system, one which rested on a foundation of American military power rather than the reliance on proxies that had formerly been the enduring feature of American policy in the region, such as the reliance on the British presence in the region prior to the 1971, the ‘Twin Pillars’ (Iran and Iraq) of the 1970s, and the dependence on Iraq as a buffer against Iran in the 1980s. Therefore, it is unlikely that the decision not to do so in the 1990s derived from any deep-seated ideological distaste for the idea, especially from an administration that demonstrated a great deal of pragmatism in other matters of foreign policy, such as its negotiations with North Korea and Syria. In this sense, ‘dual containment’ was a logical, rational choice when these factors are considered from the perspective of the American policymakers charged with reviewing US policy in the Persian Gulf at the onset of the Clinton administration. The components for a regional balance of power were not in place, from an American perspective, for such a policy to be feasible, and with the end of the Cold War the US felt much freer to pursue a more overt role, which was assisted by the marginal military capacity of Iran and Iraq. Were alternatives available? As one former official interviewed for this thesis admitted, it would have been ‘remarkable’ to expect the US to “walk away” from its existing commitments in the region in 1992 in the wake of the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This would have necessitated reneging on the defence agreements it was negotiating with several GCC states and the traditional role the US had played had played as the security guarantor to Saudi Arabia, not to mention a radical re-appraisal of American engagement with the region. In that sense, a more ‘hands off’ approach was never an option. In creating and pursuing the policy of dual containment, the US therefore conformed closely to the realist mindset that had dominated American policy towards the Persian Gulf in previous decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Quinn, *US Foreign Policy in Context: National Ideology from the founders to the Bush Doctrine* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2010)

## 9.2 NCR and intervening variables

However, the narrative discussed above is complicated by the presence of other factors in this process, as well as subsequent events in the 1990s. While it is possible to consider the situation faced by American policymakers in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War and the arrival of the Clinton administration in abstract, geostrategic terms in this way, doing so misses important aspects of the story. These aspects are located primarily in domestic American politics, or the ‘unit level’ to use the terminology of IR theory, and played important roles in shaping policy at different stages, both in conception and implementation. The most obvious of these at the initial stages of the formulation of dual containment is perception, both of American power and of the nature of the threats to American interests in the Persian Gulf in this period. In particular, the nature of the American relationship with Iran played a major role in defining its place in the American-dominated security system of the Persian Gulf as a threat to be contained, despite the fact that the two states had not come to blows (while the US and Iran engaged in a series of naval skirmishes during the Iran-Iraq War, this could not compare with the war over Kuwait) and Iran, unlike Iraq, had not attacked any of its neighbours. While President Bush (1988-1991) had made a cautious attempt to enlist Iran in freeing American hostages in Lebanon, and perhaps reach a wider accommodation while doing so, this had come to nothing by the arrival of the Clinton administration in 1992. Even if the Clinton administration had reached office with radical new plans to break with previous Persian Gulf policy (there were no signs that it did), it lacked the time and inclination to bring Iran ‘in from the cold,’ and the Clinton administration was arguably therefore left with the option of ‘containing’ Iran almost by default. The negative perceptions of Iran stemming from the pre-existing antagonistic relationship between the two states was therefore inextricably intertwined with American strategic concerns in the region, and would continue to be so. These aspects can therefore only be understood by considering the relationship between the US and Iran, which informs this picture in profound ways. As stated, this relationship in turn can only be considered in reference to domestic American politics.

Given the need to integrate unit level variables into the analysis of dual containment, while maintaining an overall realist framework that reflects wider American concerns and its role as an external superpower, from the outset this thesis utilised NCR to explain dual containment, one that incorporates insights and research drawn from the FPA strand of scholarship in International Relations. It has done so by utilising the works of Thomas Risse, and some of his collaborators and co-authors, by incorporating factors he identifies as making up the relative autonomy of policymakers as amongst the ‘intervening variables’ at work in the case of dual containment, alongside the perceptual variable: a state’s domestic political structure, and the policy coalitions operating within it. It is hoped that this thesis has demonstrated that this is a valid approach, identifying the role played by the domestic structure of the American federal government, and the role of domestic interest groups, on the formation of foreign policy in general and the impact of these factors in shaping dual containment policy. These were identified as key variables thanks to the idiosyncratic influence of domestic political forces on American foreign policy, which Risse and others argue is very strong, especially in relation to other states, despite the widely-held view that foreign policy is virtually the exclusive preserve of the President.

In particular, the ‘invitation to struggle’ identified by Corwin was at work in the case of American policy towards Iran and Iraq in the 1990s, in both the legislation passed to direct foreign policy, and the defining of limits of what was permissible and possible for the executive branch to pursue in regards to these states. This was influenced somewhat by some interest groups, outside of the formal structures of government in some cases, to both persuade legislators to adopt their policy proposals, and at the same time assist them in turning their proposals into law. This can be seen in legislation like the 1996 Iran-Libya Sanctions Act and the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act, which stand out like landmarks on a larger landscape of American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. In the case of pro-Israel lobbyists like AIPAC, their credibility, moral authority as allies of Israel and, their high degree of professionalism in the pursuit of their goals, together with the inherent advantages enjoyed by the lobby, ensured that their ideas and proposals were taken seriously and heard sympathetically by legislators



and officials, and allowed them to successfully insert their proposals into the policymaking process. In contrast, lobbyists for corporations with substantial economic interests in reopening trade with Iran were unsuccessful in persuading legislators to move away from a sanctions-led policy even though they enjoyed greater financial resources, despite the relaxation of restrictions on the export of some goods (especially foodstuffs). To be fair, this may also reflect unwillingness on the part of Congress to narrow its own range of options for influencing the policymaking process by making it more difficult to impose sanctions. In the case of Iraq, legislators were also successful in inserting their agenda into official policy by legislating the adoption of 'regime change' as the avowed goal of American Iraq policy, albeit with little real impact due to the White House's control of the mechanisms of policy implementation. In this sense, rancour between the two competing branches was also an important factor, as it has always been in the formulation of American foreign policy, as it made the legislative branch more willing to engage in this kind of foreign policy activism, especially since the end of the Cold War had lowered the threshold for doing so.

At the same time, this was strongly influenced by the negative perceptions of both Iran and Iraq held by policymakers, legislators, lobbyists and the general public, though naturally the intensity and the nature of these perceptions was different on a case-by-case basis, and modulated by institutional and personal outlooks. Part of this 'negative perception,' for want of a better term, stemmed from the attachment between Israel and the US, and the strong commitment of the Clinton administration to the Oslo Process, which helped ensure that Israel was able to influence (but not determine) American policymakers' perceptions of threat vis-à-vis Iran. Also important was the fraught history between the US and Iran, and to some degree Iraq, which did much to determine how these two states were perceived by American officials. In the case of Iran in particular, the legacy of the 1979 revolution and the hostage crisis that followed the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran has overshadowed all subsequent US-Iranian relations, and coloured the American perception of Iran as a threat to American interests in the Persian Gulf, making the pursuit of a policy based on dialogue and diplomacy politically difficult.

With regards to Iraq, American policy remained unreservedly hostile throughout the 1990s, and Saddam Hussein's continued rule in Iraq was perceived as an enduring nuisance, but one that the White House was prepared to live with, whereas a substantial number of legislators pushed for a more hard-line, aggressive policy.

In contrast, the executive branch proved to be more cautious and (instrumentally) rational in its policymaking, in terms of its assessment of American power and the threat posed by Iran and Iraq, and the means to address them. Its assessment of the situation was coloured by some biases, but for the most part it avoided the temptation to use American power to attempt to impose radical changes on the states of the Gulf. Its attempts to topple Saddam Hussein were carried out covertly and indirectly, indicating that it was cognisant of the costs and risks involved in 'regime change.' Iran was a somewhat similar case: the history of antagonism between the two states ruled out its rehabilitation at the end of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and the White House bowed to political pressure to maintain its isolation when this coincided with the desire to advance the Arab-Israeli peace process. Nonetheless, once an opening arrived in the form of the election of Khatami, the Clinton administration was diligent in its attempts to pursue a reconciliation, though the controversial nature of such a policy (in both states) meant that this had to be approached carefully, with an eye towards the domestic political environment, which remained consistently hostile and antagonistic towards Iran in important respects, imposing political costs and limiting the freedom of the White House to manoeuvre. Nonetheless, the administration was able to use the powers of the presidency to water down attempts to further escalate American-Iranian tensions originating in Congress and elsewhere. While Iraq was obviously the main object of concern, Iran remained a problem for American policymakers. Bush's tentative approach to re-opening relations had come to nothing, for reasons that are still disputed amongst some scholars. The depth of antagonism between the US and Iran would require a major, bilateral effort to overcome the mutual suspicion between the two states, and also Congressional approval would be needed to remove the sanctions on Iran. This would likely be a condition of any reconciliation between

the US and Iran, giving Congress a great deal of leverage over any administration that sought to improve relations with Iran.

### **9.3 Intervening variables assessed**

With hindsight, and with the individual analysis of the role of each variable complete, we can turn to the question of which proved to be the most important factor. The importance of each variable in relation to the others is difficult to assess. Upon closer inspection, it is far from clear that they can be meaningfully separated in terms of their contributions to the conception and evolution of dual containment, making an assessment of this kind frustratingly difficult. Taking a broad overview of the issue, it is clear that the intervening variables identified in this thesis form an interlocking lattice or web in this case, especially the ‘domestic institutions’ and the ‘coalition-building processes’/‘policy coalitions’ at work in dual containment – the policy coalitions operate within the context of the American domestic political system, meaning that they cannot be wholly disaggregated, and are instead in a sense reflections of each other. Some of the members of the ‘policy coalitions’ active in shaping dual containment were themselves members of the institutional structure as Senators and Representatives, the powers of which were defined in part by the nature of the domestic structure of the federal government, and defined in other ways by their political influence, which was in turn partly a reflection of the policy coalitions at work. These two variables in particular are therefore overlapping and co-constitutive in an important sense that makes them difficult to disaggregate.

The perceptions of policymakers are somewhat more distinct, but still closely linked to the other intervening variables, as these were the means by which these perceptions of threat, power and interest were acted upon. Furthermore, the fact that the perceptions differed in important ways between different individuals and groups is also significant. This was reflected in the domestic ‘balance of power’ between the legislative and executive branches of the government, which is a core feature of the ‘domestic structure’: as discussed

in chapters 6 and 7, the executive branch has always held a more nuanced and, in many ways, realistic view of the nature of the ‘threat’ posed by Iran, Iraq, and political Islam. In comparison, the legislature at times advocated a more simplistic, less flexible approach, and based on the public statements of important legislators, a more alarmist view of the dangers posed by Iran and Iraq. This also reflects the differing perceptions of different ‘policy coalitions’ acting within the institutional framework of the federal government of the US. Moreover, different ‘policy coalitions’ expressed different perceptions of Iran. Lobbyists and advocates for maintaining and expanding American trade links with Iran were largely unsuccessful in advancing their agenda, whereas advocates of sanctions and a more confrontational approach enjoyed more success. Perceptions played a key role in this process. As we saw in chapter 6 and 8, Iran was (and to some degree still is) perceived in highly negative terms within the US, and this was one of the major reasons that no politically-effective constituency mobilised on its behalf. Those that did mobilise, such as the exporters’ lobbying organisation USA\*Engage, were forced to struggle in the face of these negative perceptions, while those pressing for a more hard-line position held a comparative advantage. Iraq, synonymous with Saddam Hussein, on the other hand, was near-universally distrusted. Disagreements therefore focused in large part on means rather than ends in regards to policy towards Iraq, though outcry amongst some sections of the American public over the humanitarian impact of the international sanctions regime embarrassed the Clinton administration at times.

The role of the perceptions of policymakers cannot therefore be understood fully in isolation from the other two intervening variables, and none would be effective at all in absence of the other two. Nonetheless, the perception that Iran was hostile to the US in 1992 formed a major factor in the judgement that a ‘dual containment’ policy backed by an American presence in the Persian Gulf was the preferred course of action, which was made by officials serving in the executive branch and endorsed by the President. This decision had three aspects – recognition of the mutual mistrust between the two states, recognition of the deep unpopularity of Iran amongst Congress and the public, and an ingrained mistrust of Iran amongst policymakers (such as Secretary of State

Warren Christopher). Of the intervening variables examined in this thesis, American perceptions of Iran, largely negative, were therefore ‘prior’ to the other two in that they formed a substantial part of the original assessments underpinning dual containment.

However, when we consider the policy of dual containment more widely, and include subsequent developments in the policy, such as Congressional attempts to toughen sanctions and Clinton’s attempts to cultivate Khatami, to say nothing of later developments in American policy towards Iraq, the picture becomes cloudier once again, and we must look beyond monocausal explanations. Bearing this in mind, it seems that the key issue is therefore one of *interaction*. Without the interaction of these three intervening variables, dual containment would not have evolved in the ways in which it did. Aside from the role of policymakers’ perceptions, if any can be said to be most fundamental of the remaining pair, it is the domestic structure of the US federal government and its policymaking apparatus. The division of powers between the executive and the legislative branches, by a combination of constitutional mandate, custom and convention, defined the procedures and limits of the policymaking process, yet by itself was not decisive – given its nature, it could not be. The interplay of domestic political forces, operating within the structure of institutions, were important in determining policy in the sense that they too shaped the limits of political acceptability, and in some cases successfully brought about alterations in policy. These different coalitions acted according to their perceptions of Iran and Iraq, which were in turn part of a wider perception of Iran and Iraq as dangerous, hostile, anti-American states.

Overall, in a wider perspective, American mistrust of Iran and Iraq proved to be a large part of the decision to pursue a largely-unilateral two-track concurrent containment policy that was the hallmark of dual containment. In terms of the actual policy pursued by the US, the implementation and evolution of dual containment reflected the division of powers between the legislative and executive branches of the federal government and the on-going struggle between the two. While the legislature was able to impose some broad limits and conditions upon the Clinton administration, particularly in terms of sanctions on

Iran, the administration was able to use the ‘traditional’ prerogatives of the presidency in foreign affairs, chiefly the day-to-day management of the foreign policy apparatus, to pursue its chosen policies as best as it could within these broad limits.

## 9.4 Possible avenues of future research

Despite the demonstrated relevance of this approach and the interaction of the three intervening variables examined in this thesis, theoretical and conceptual questions remain to be answered. Arguably the most substantial of these is the question of ideology and national identity: although this has been something that has not been covered in great depth in this thesis, it would be naïve in the extreme to assume that they played (and continue to play) no role in the formation of American foreign policy. The role of identity in International Relations has been a subject of intense study and fierce debate within the field, and was given an added impetus by the rise of ‘constructivism’ in recent decades. Consequently, a wider examination of the degree to which American strategic and political culture shapes the perceptions of policymakers and the public, and the means by which it does so, would be a valuable addition to NCR accounts like those of this thesis. This would also contribute to the on-going codification of NCR theory and attempts of scholars working in this tradition to formalize an NCR model of the state. The logical assumption would be that this would involve the addition of another intervening variable to the mix, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to speculate further about how an NCR framework could be modified and conceptualised to include it, though it should be noted that scholars who have made some moves in this direction seem to have done so.<sup>2</sup> This would doubtless increase the complexity of the picture exponentially – especially when one considers the possible linkages between political/strategic culture and domestic political structures and coalitions, and the question of how these in particular have impacted upon each other.

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<sup>2</sup> At time of writing, some of the most notable examples with regards to American foreign policy are the aforementioned Adam Quinn, in his book *US Foreign Policy in Perspective*, and Nicholas Kitchen, ‘Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation,’ *Review of International Studies*, 36 (1) 2010, pp.117-143

It would also be interesting to see if a similar NCR model could be applied to a study of Iranian foreign policy, and if the same or similar intervening variables were at work in shaping Iranian foreign policy. Some attempt was made at this in chapter 4, with the examination of the regional politics of the Persian Gulf, and a deeper study that integrates a theoretical framework (something which, as stated in the introduction of this thesis, has been lacking in too much research into the Middle East) would doubtless benefit both our understanding of Iran and its foreign policy process, but also help advance the on-going project of NCR, if only incrementally. Understanding of the dynamics of the Persian Gulf sub-region would also benefit, given the interpenetration of these states and the necessity of their governments to balance both externally and internally, as discussed in chapter 4. In the case of Iraq, the fall of Saddam Hussein and his regime has led to a huge cache of official documents becoming available to scholars, and there will doubtless be a number of studies published detailing the decision-making process of Ba'athist Iraq.<sup>3</sup> However, states remain a 'moving target,' and contemporary Iraq and Iran will remain more obscure, even as the political situation becomes more urgent. Sadly, the opacity and complexity of the Iranian political system in particular makes this a daunting task, though the rewards would be correspondingly great, given the importance and influence of Iran in the Persian Gulf and the intensity of its relationship with the United States. Nonetheless, the prospect is an intriguing one. It would be ironic, and perhaps appropriate, if we were to discover that both parties in this unique relationship approached it and conceptualised it in the same ways.

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<sup>3</sup> So far, these have included Kevin Woods, David Palkki and Mark Stout's (eds.), *The Saddam Tapes: The inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime, 1978-2001* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

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